



Royal visit

FOR THE first time in three years, King Hussein of Jordan is scheduled to visit Syria on Saturday for talks with President Hafez Al-Assad on means to revive the peace process and seal reconciliation efforts between the two countries.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu is due in Jordan next Monday for talks with King Hussein. It will be his second Arab stop after his visit to Egypt.

In a related development, the Jordanian government delayed on Tuesday its controversial decision to triple the price of bread, as it tried to finalise a compensation package for consumers.

State secret

A KEY Israeli architect of the Palestinian-Israeli Oslo Accords has disclosed that the Labour government, defeated in the elections two months ago, almost reached a secret agreement with the PLO on the creation of a Palestinian state. The Abu Dis district in a suburb of East Jerusalem was to be its capital, after being renamed as Al-Quds.

Yeh Hirschfeld said in an interview with the Jewish settlers magazine *Nekuda* that a preliminary accord took place just two weeks before Premier Yitzhak Rabin was assassinated in October 1995. The two sides agreed that Israel would annex 10 per cent of the West Bank and that the Palestinian state would be created from the remaining 90 per cent of the territory and the Gaza Strip. The Palestinian flag would have been flown on the Temple Mount in Jerusalem's old city, which would have remained under Israeli control, but been devoid of sovereignty.

Yossi Beilin, the top policy advisor to former Prime Minister Shimon Peres, confirmed the revelations and told the Associated Press news agency that the information, if true, could still serve as a blueprint for a peace agreement in the future.

Qorei stays

THE PRESIDENT of the Palestinian Legislative Council, Ahmed Qorei, has withdrawn his resignation, tendered the previous day, after reaching a compromise with President Yasser Arafat in a meeting in Bethlehem late on Tuesday, a council source said yesterday. The source did not give details of the compromise.

Qorei, a key figure on the Palestinian negotiating team for the Oslo Accords, clashed with Arafat over a draft constitution allowing the council to pass legislation during the interim period of autonomy before the achievement of a final settlement. Arafat had tried to stop the legislative council from debating this draft constitution, drawn up by a parliamentary committee, and AP and AFP reported, had urged the council to allow a PLO committee to draw up an alternative.

Qorei insisted that Arafat had reneged on an agreement to allow the council to go ahead with its debate while a parallel discussion took place within the PLO committee. Qorei's resignation was refused by the council and by Arafat.

In another development, Israeli police released a council member, Abbas Zaki, after arresting him on Tuesday on his way back from Jordan, and Arafat refused a Palestinian security agent for military trial, on suspicion of torturing a prisoner who was left brain dead in a West Bank hospital.

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Peace as a condition

Clinton pledged to act effectively in the Middle East and Mubarak stressed peace as the most effective way to uproot terrorism. Maurice Guindi writes

A major aim of President Hosni Mubarak's US visit was to secure a new and firm commitment of an active American role in efforts to conclude a settlement between Israel on the one hand and the Palestinians, Syria and Lebanon on the other. Mubarak succeeded in this. The pledge of US intervention came in remarks by both Mubarak and Clinton at a news conference following their talks Tuesday.

This was confirmed by Osama El-Baz, Mubarak's chief political advisor, who told *Nevine Khalil* after the talks, that there were no "significant disagreements on any issue" in the Mubarak-Clinton talks. "El-Baz conceded, however, that prior to the Mubarak visit, Egypt was worried about possible 'wandering' in the US position on Middle East peace. During his visit to Washington, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu 'presented a new formula and a new approach for peace, and certain circles in the region, including ourselves, feared that his position did not encounter any visible opposition [from the US administration], and that this could mean some erosion in the American position," El-Baz said.

These fears proved unfounded, El-Baz asserted. "When we came here we were reassured the US position remained unchanged."

But the American stance was tempered by a plea Clinton made to Egypt and other Arabs to give the new Israeli government of Netanyahu time to get organised before launching into talks with the Arabs. Netanyahu took office last month and began his preparations with visits to

the United States and Egypt.

There was a marked difference in emphasis in the opening statements Mubarak and Clinton made at the news conference. The Egyptian leader devoted the greater part of his speech to the specifics of the peace effort. Clinton's statement focused more on the issue of terrorism and the need to combat it. But the US leader made clear that Washington will do everything it can to move the peace process forward. He specified the need for progress in Israeli-Palestinian negotiations and also for a resumption of talks on the Israeli and Lebanese tracks. Mubarak did not belittle the dangers of terrorism but he actively linked it to the Middle East peace settlement as cause and effect.

"If we can reach a comprehensive peace settlement in this sensitive part of the world, which affects Europe and the United States and others, I believe that we would be able to put an end to at least 95 per cent of terrorist acts in the world," Mubarak said.

While recognising terrorism as a serious problem, Mubarak declined to go along with a Clinton initiative to isolate Libya, Iran, Iraq and Sudan as pariah states that sponsor terrorism.

And while US officials had hoped that Mubarak would not publicly oppose Washington policy on this line, the Egyptian president told the press conference that he is against "punishing innocent peoples" and that any anti-terrorism measures should solely target those who commit terrorism.

But both heads of state made a point of playing down differences in opinion over priorities. At the beginning of

the press conference both leaders exchanged terms of cordiality and shook hands twice to publicly put to rest rumours of tension that have been circulating about differences concerning the Middle East peace process.

"I have been very impressed with the leadership that President Mubarak has shown in the last several months," Clinton said.

Affirming the role of his country as a major sponsor of the peace talks, Clinton said, "The United States will continue to do all we can with our friends in Israel and in the Arab nations to preserve what we have achieved for peace and to move forward."

Prior to his official talks with Mubarak, the US president told reporters that the Israeli prime minister has promised to honour the accords concluded with the Palestinians and should be given a chance to prove it.

"He [Netanyahu] reaffirmed to me when he was here, and he has met with President Mubarak as well, that he would honour the Oslo Accords in every way. So I think we have to give him a chance to do that and work on that assumption. I believe that... I think that the government is bound to honour commitments that it has made, and I believe that it will, and I certainly believe it should," Clinton said.

The Oslo Accords gave the Palestinians self-rule in the West Bank and Gaza. Despite opposition to it, the accord is generally believed to be a step towards Palestinian self-determination and a lasting peace in the region.

Egypt has repeatedly warned that if Israel was to renege on the agreement, this would probably plunge the Middle

East into a new crisis.

While Mubarak and Clinton were meeting, news was publicised of Israeli plans to lift the ban on settlement construction and build new roads in the Occupied Territories. Clinton would not commit himself to put pressure on Israel to halt their expansionist plans and go back to the negotiation table on basis of the land-for-peace formula. He pleaded with the Arabs to show understanding to the change of government in Israel. "I would ask the people of Egypt to be just a little patient here and give us a chance to put this back on track."

Clinton's firm commitments, however, were exclusively related to his scheme to combat terrorism. "You simply cannot continue to do ordinary business with people who believe they have a right to practice commerce with you in the daytime and send terrorists to kill your innocent civilians at night," Clinton told the conference.

Clinton is set to sign a bill this week punishing foreign firms investing in the oil sectors in Iran and Libya.

According to an US administration official, Washington had hoped to get Egypt's consent on that plan.

Mubarak, the first Arab leader to meet with Clinton since the election of Netanyahu, was adamant in affirming the points agreed on by the Arab nations in their Cairo summit last June.

"All the Arab leaders who met in Cairo last month affirm their support for the peace process. Their strategic decision was to enhance and continue the process. This never happened during the past 50 years," Mubarak told the conference.

A common resolve

Mubarak and Clinton agreed on the need to resume the Middle East peace process as soon as possible. But there is no expectation of a breakthrough and no illusions about the difficulties on the Syrian-Israeli track. Hoda Tawfik in Washington evaluates the talks

Egypt's role in promoting a Middle East settlement, as highlighted by President Hosni Mubarak's Washington visit this week, has been recognised by US officials as a "keystone" for forward movement. The Mubarak-Clinton talks have underlined the need for a speedy resumption of the stalled peace negotiations while acknowledging that a successful conclusion is not round the corner.

"It was President Clinton's idea to invite President Mubarak here because of the critical role that Egypt plays," State Department spokesman Nicholas Burns told reporters at a briefing on the eve of the summit meeting.

US officials went out of their way to quash vigorously all reports about recent tensions in Cairo-Washington relations as a result of different approaches to regional issues. "Egypt, as an African country, as well as an Arab country, has influence far beyond its borders on a lot of regional issues in Africa and the Middle East," Burns said. "And we rely upon Egypt in many of these issues to guide us. When you look around the Middle East, there are few relationships like this one that withstand the tests and turns of the Middle East peace negotiations."

Aluding to the fact that Egypt is the world's second largest recipient of US foreign aid, the spokesman said: "There is a fundamental American commitment to Egypt that will not be reduced."

In this climate of amity, Mubarak frankly outlined to Clinton his views and worries about the situation in the Middle East if the new Israeli government does not remain committed to the Madrid peace conference's basic principles, foremost among them trading land for peace. Mubarak also warned against continued Israeli settlement construction in occupied Arab territories.

Critical questions were raised about the possibility of reviving Israeli-Syrian talks in particular and the time frame for this.

Both American and Egyptian officials told *Al-Ahram Weekly* that Cairo and Washington came to the conclusion that moving on the Syrian track is going to be "a tough nut to crack." There are some

"very significant differences" between Israel and Syria, a State Department official said. "I would not look for any immediate results on that score," he added.

An Egyptian official, who preferred to remain anonymous, stressed that the US administration is not out to isolate Syria, but, on the contrary, is trying to find an opening to help resume the Israeli-Syrian talks.

In an interview with the *Weekly*, US Assistant Secretary of State for Near Eastern Affairs Robert Pelletreau said: "It is clear that Syria is interested in pursuing peace, so there is a role for both Egypt and the United States to play. Israel wants to continue negotiations with Syria and Lebanon, he added, 'but perhaps with a different approach than the previous Israeli government' of Shimon Peres.

"I do not think the picture should be painted black," Pelletreau said. He emphasised that next November's US presidential elections are "not an obstacle for the resumption of the peace talks which definitely must be on the basis of the Madrid principles, that is to implement (Security Council Resolution) 242 and land for peace."

The US hopes to find a formula to minimise differences between the two sides, Pelletreau said. He noted that different approaches to and interpretations of Resolution 242 by Israel and the Arabs in the past "did not hinder the search for peace and reaching agreements."

The Egyptian official who spoke on condition of anonymity told the *Weekly* that the Clinton administration came closer to the Egyptian approach than to the positions taken publicly by Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu in Israel and during his recent visit to Washington. What Netanyahu claimed about agreement with the American position on the peace process is simply not true, the official said.

The extensive exchanges between Mubarak and Clinton and other American officials highlighted these points:

• Cairo and Washington agree that stimulating the peace process is imperative

before the end of the year.

• No one expects breakthroughs in the negotiations soon.

• No significant pressures will come from Washington before the presidential elections.

• The Clinton administration has the issue of terrorism very much on its mind. Clinton understands full well the dangers that a continuing stalemate in peace talks could bring in terms of an upswing in acts of terrorism. In this context, Anthony Lake, Clinton's advisor on national security, told reporters before the summit that terrorism is "a very, very serious issue" and that it was "looming home to the United States in a way as never before."

Lake told reporters after meeting privately with President Mubarak on Monday "A very important central point here is that beyond the specific measures we take to combat terrorism, we must also make sure that we never give in to terrorism by abandoning our goals to bring a comprehensive and just peace to the Middle East."

• Both the US and Egypt are alert to the explosive situation in the West Bank and Jerusalem as Jewish settlers press Netanyahu to lift the ban on new housing construction imposed by the previous government.

On the Syrian track, America's Middle East mediator Dennis Ross was told on his recent visit to Damascus that President Hafez Assad wants new proposals from Israel and that new talks should pick up where negotiators left off before the current freeze. Egyptian officials said Mubarak agreed in the talks that Syria cannot resume the talks from point zero and is not interested in lengthy negotiations dragging on without results.

Egyptian Foreign Minister Amr Moussa, in remarks to reporters, explained the Egyptian approach to the Syrian track.

"It was the Israeli government that requested suspension of the talks between the ambassadors from Syria and Israel in the American capital," he said. "So it is time for the country that requested suspension to request resumption — on the basis of the Madrid conference."

KURASAT ISTRATIJIYA (39)



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Annual subscription price (mailing cost included) - Egypt: Individuals L.E.40: Arab countries: Individuals \$25 Organisations L.E. 50: All other countries: \$50

Payment in cash or by cheque payable to: Al-Ahram Subscriptions Department: Al-Ahram Galaa St. Cairo

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An Arab definition of terrorism

Security experts met in Cairo to discuss terrorism in the region, reports Jallan Malawi

Arab countries, meeting in Cairo to discuss strategies for combating terrorism, finished work on Tuesday night with an agreed definition of terrorism and potential means of curbing the problem in the region.

Security experts from 16 countries closed a two-day session to draw up a draft strategy to be approved by the 22 interior ministers of the Arab League during their next council meeting in January. The meeting defined terrorism as any organised violence that caused terror or panic. But the definition did not include "armed struggle by peoples under foreign occupation to free their lands and realise their rights of self-determination," reported Ahmed El-Salem, secretary-general of the Arab Interior Ministers

Council, which is sponsored by the Arab League. "I believe that the biggest achievement of this strategy is that it represents a unified Arab understanding of terrorism," El-Salem continued. The Arab stand, he added, would be based "on the extradition of wanted terrorists and the adoption of strong measures against terrorists in Arab nations."

El-Salem refused to specify if any steps would be taken against Arab countries supporting terrorism. "We cannot enter into such details before the strategy is adopted by the ministers," he said.

Under the proposals, Arab nations would commit themselves to "strengthening the punishments against the perpetrators of terrorist acts and to freezing and seizing money intended to finance these acts," a final statement issued by the session said.

The statement called for "strengthening the cooperation against terrorism between the members" by the "exchange of help in searching for, investigating and arresting fugitives accused or convicted of terrorist crimes."

According to El-Salem, the strategy would also include a "plan for implementation to be reviewed every five years."

Sudan, accused by Egypt of harbouring terrorists waging a war against the Egyptian government, was a notable absentee from the meeting, despite the fact that it had been invited and expressed its intention to attend.

The Arab daily *Al-Hayat* quoted a spokesman at the Sudanese Embassy in Cairo, Abdel-Azim Awad, as saying the Egyptian authorities had refused to

provide entry visas to the Sudanese delegation.

But the Egyptian deputy interior minister, Mustafa Abdel-Qader, maintained: "Egypt did not prevent Sudan from attending."

Khartoum was hit by UN diplomatic sanctions in May for allegedly harbouring three Egyptian militants accused of involvement in the June 1995 assassination attempt on President Hosni Mubarak in Ethiopia.

Delegates will meet again in January to devise a detailed plan to fight terrorism. According to El-Salem, they were expected to agree on greater cooperation in investigations, arrests and extraditions. Another issue still to be addressed is the granting of political asylum to suspected terrorists by western nations.

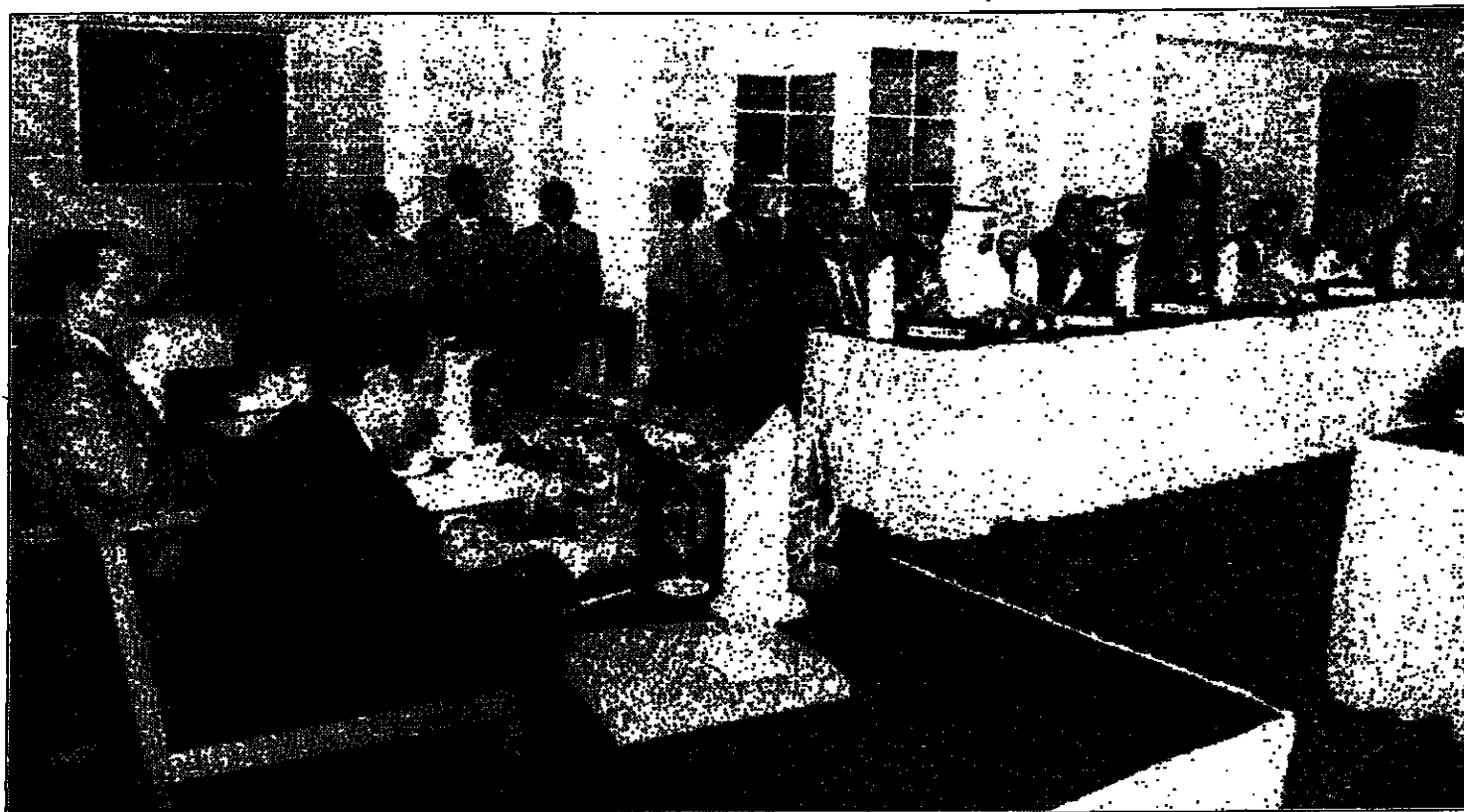


Photo: Nour Sobieh

The right to organise

In this part of his series of articles on the role of the Supreme Constitutional Court as a guardian of human rights, the court's Chief Justice Awad

El-Morr deals with freedom of association and the right to join political parties



Freedom of association, which primarily aims at safeguarding everyone's right to freedom of peaceful assembly, to join the association he chooses, and not to be compelled to belong to an association, is considered a fundamental, self-evident and inalienable right possessed by the people and provided for by Article 54 of the Constitution. This article stipulates that citizens shall have the right to peaceful private assemblage without prior notification or attendance of any police officer, and that public meetings, processions and gatherings be secured within the limits prescribed by law.

Article 55 of the Constitution guarantees the right to form an association provided that its activities are not clandestine, of a military nature or hostile to societal public order.

In case No. 56 of the 6th judicial year the Supreme Constitutional Court was confronted with a sensitive question that had arisen in connection with Article 4 of Law No 33 for the year 1978 concerning the protection of the internal front and social peace. According to this article, "shall be deprived of the right to join political parties, and of the exercise of rights and activities of a political nature, whoever had caused the corruption of political life prior to the Revolution of July 1952, either through participation in the leadership or the administration of political parties in power before the revolution, or by holding ministerial duties as a member of those parties, with the exception in both cases of the national party and the socialist party."

"Shall be considered as participation in the leadership or the administration of a party, the holding of the office of its leader or of his associates or the office of secretary-general or of his aide, or the office of the treasurer, or the mere membership in the higher authority of the party."

Citizens affected by the implications of Article 4 of that law, brought a case before the Judicial Administrative Court, the subject matter of which was the annulment of an administrative decision which barred them from participation in all political activities in reliance on that article.

Upon a challenge to its validity, and a *prima facie* finding by the Court of Merits of the plausibility of the Constitutional issue so raised, that court referred it for adjudication to the Supreme Constitutional Court.

The government argued that the Constitutional issue under consideration was a political question falling beyond the jurisdiction of the court because the challenged article was sanctioned in a popular referendum with a view to securing the safety of the State, and achieving its political interests in maintaining a unified national front and social peace.

In denying this argument, the Court recognised that Article 152 of the Constitution, which provides for public referendum in matters of significance affecting the higher interests of the State, only permits the president of the republic to submit to the electorate whatever matters he deems sufficiently weighty due to their pertinence to vital national interests.

Therefore, such a referendum — the nature and objective of which the Constitution concedes and demarcates — cannot be taken as a pretext for evading Constitutional restraints.

In addition, popular support of specific principles submitted in the referendum does not entail their elevation to the rank of Constitutional provisions, nor can such consent be regarded as an amendment thereto.

Only within the stringent requirements embodied in Article 189 of the Constitution can Constitutional provisions be altered.

Therefore, statutes framed in harmony with the outcome of a referendum, will not be exempted from judicial review, so long as they remain in violation of the Constitution. In fact legislative provisions mirroring the result of a public referendum are invariably similar to those not sanctioned by direct popular approval. In both cases they ought to be treated as inferior in rank to the Constitution.

That Article 4 of the challenged Statute bears on a selected group of citizens in the exercise of their political rights preserved by the Constitution is beyond doubt. Proscribing such rights has no clear connection with the concept of political questions, and therefore should fall within the power of judicial review mandated to the Court.

As to the substantive aspects of Article 4 of Law No 33 of the year 1978, the subject of the Constitutional controversy, the court noted that political parties are associations whose activities must comply with the Constitution, including its determination of the fundamental basis of our society.

By establishing a multi-party system as a substitute for the old totalitarian regime, article 5 of the Constitution instituted the political regime on new democratic dimensions the substance of which is the affirmation of popular sovereignty through viable means which rest exclusively upon effective participation in the exercise of power.

The mere fact that democracy is based on freedom presupposes that through the machinery of political parties national policy should be freely and consciously outlined.

To base the political regime on a multi-party system necessitates — by inference — the recognition of the right of every citizen to join the party he freely chooses. Furthermore the natural structure of a party will be established, and its legitimate existence in current political life be mobilised and confirmed, mainly through the exercise of that right.

Deprivation of that right, therefore, is repugnant to the Constitution. Bearing this in mind, and having regard to the fact that the challenged statute unconditionally and indefinitely barred a specific class of citizens from being involved in political activities, and from membership of political parties, the statute was judged invalid, being in contravention with articles 5 and 62 of the Constitution.

Edited by Wadie Kirolos

Private universities get go-ahead

Four private universities are to open in Egypt. A cabinet decree, issued on the day following celebrations of the 44th anniversary of the July Revolution of 1952, has approved their establishment, and a presidential decree will be passed next week to ratify the four projects.

Opponents of the universities have lost no time in pointing out that the projects are in contradiction to the principles of the revolution, which advocates equal educational opportunities for all.

Prime Minister Kamal El-Ganzouri described the cabinet's approval as a step towards developing higher education in Egypt. Private universities, he said, would open the way for competition between the state and private education sector in a way which would serve Egyptian education as a whole. And, he added, they would also ease the burden on state universities, which are unable to handle the number of students now admitted to higher education.

The planned universities are the Egyptian International University, the Egyptian University for Science and Technology, the October University for Modern Sciences and Arts, and the Sixth of October University. The four universities, which will include more than 30 faculties and institutes, will be free to impose their own admission regulations and set fees without intervention from the Ministry of Education.

The universities are set to open in October. However, Minister of Education Hussein Kamel Bahaeddin told *Al-Ahram* that a special Ministry of Education committee is to fix the date for the beginning of their first academic year after checking that buildings are completed and properly equipped, and ensuring that teaching staff and administrative boards are fully prepared.

The move towards private higher education began in 1992, when the People's Assembly passed Law 101, which allows

With Egypt heading towards the free-market economy, the cabinet has approved the establishment of four private universities. Mona El-Nahhas investigates the potential fallout

the establishment of private universities. The law established various regulations to exert a minimal level of government control. For example, the appointment of university presidents must be approved by the Minister of Education, and non-Egyptians cannot occupy leading posts without ministry approval. In addition, the private universities are to be indirectly supervised by the Supreme Council for Universities, in so far as the Council will be responsible for monitoring standards to ensure that graduation certificates from state and private universities represent an equal educational level.

Following the issue of Law 101, projects for universities were submitted to the Ministry of Education. They were first referred to the Administrative Court to verify that they were within the law before being returned to the ministry, which in turn sent them for discussion in the cabinet.

The projects became the subject of heated controversy during the cabinet debate in 1995. The cabinet formed a higher committee, including university professors and educational experts, which decided that the schemes had all failed to fulfil the necessary conditions to enable them to go ahead. The committee also added new regulations, and then the cabinet decided to adopt a wait-and-see attitude.

Then, on 20 July this year, the cabinet, whose composition had now changed, formed a 5-member committee headed by the Minister of Education to give its opinion on the projects within two weeks. However, after just two days, committee members informed the cabinet of their approval, and the cabinet decree was immediately issued.

Sources opposed to the universities assert that the decree was motivated by political rather than educational considerations. They claim the universities lack buildings, academic staff and boards of directors.

"The establishment of private universities contradicts the principles of the 1971 Constitution, which calls for equal opportunities in education, work and all aspects of life for all citizens," said a senior member of the University Teaching Staff Club. "Only the rich will have the chance of a distinguished higher education, while the middle and lower classes will be deprived of such an advantage. In addition, because the private universities will offer very high salaries, professors will be lured away from the state sector to work for them," the source added.

However education activist and former MP Mona Makram Ebeid sees the private sector as a route to improving educational standards. "Private universities are a must if we want to achieve a qualitative leap in education, bearing in mind the fact that the standard of higher education in Egypt is still very low compared with other countries. As the state is unable to extend and develop higher education, we have no alternative but to accept the idea of establishing private universities."

Latest statistics show that only 19.8 per cent of Egypt's young people go into higher education. In Jordan this figure increases to 26.6 per cent, in Israel it is 34 per cent, and in the USA 59.6 per cent.

Ebeid stressed the need for quality as well as quantity in university graduates. "Private universities should be able to develop methods of study that meet the needs of society," she said.

She pointed out that there is nothing new in the idea of private universities. Some of the world's largest universities are private and, in Egypt, higher education was originally private — including Cairo University (established as the Egyptian University in 1908).

But she stresses that the education system must not be left entirely in the hands of market forces. "Profit should not be the main objective of private universities. That would destroy the whole educational process and threaten social equilibrium."

She was also concerned about the possibility of the emergence of a two-tier system, whereby rich students would be able to buy a far better education. "That's why it's essential that there should be moral and ethical criteria, such as giving priority to excellent students rather than those with social prestige," she said.

Regulations are also necessary "to guarantee that private universities would not turn into centres trading in academic degrees," she said.

According to Nawal El-Degwi, who represents the 30 founders of the October University for Modern Sciences and Arts, "The aim of the project is to provide excellent students with a very distinguished level of education... We've been making contacts with more than 30 universities in the US and Great Britain to get acquainted with the most advanced educational techniques in the world." October University is to be affiliated to Sheffield University in the UK, and, claimed El-Degwi, would offer an equal level of education.

The university has five faculties: engineering, computers, management, accounting and economics. According to

El-Degwi, students will also receive special English courses and have access to the Internet.

El-Degwi said the university would be ready to accept students in the new academic year. "We've defined the curriculum, and the hours allocated for each subject. We've agreed on a staff exchange with Sheffield University. In addition, there are hundreds of PhD holders from foreign universities who haven't been able to work in the state system, which has a surplus of professors."

The university is to be located on around 50 feddans of land in Sixth of October City. Work on establishing and equipping the building there, will take up to three years, and was expected to cost LE150 million, El-Degwi said. "Until then, students will attend their lectures at the university's two branches in Zamalek and Dokki, which are equipped with laboratories and computer networks." The university is not planning to accept more than 300 students a year until work is complete, she added.

However, sources allege that these "branches" are in reality IGCSE (International General Certificate of Secondary Education) language schools.

Students who have been through either the IGCSE and Egyptian *thanaweya amma* education systems, and can pay the estimated LE15,000 annual fees, will be eligible to apply for a place at Sixth of October. But criteria for admission varies from that applied by the Ministry of Education at state universities. "Admission for the faculty of engineering, for example, depends on the grades the students got in algebra, mechanics and other subjects which are relevant to that faculty," El-Degwi explained.

According to El-Degwi, the university's board of directors includes former university presidents and deans, and educational experts. A university president is to be appointed within the next few days.

Cairo ring road launched

PRIME Minister Kamel El-Ganzouri has inaugurated the first stage of the ring road that is to run around Cairo, intersecting with the main highways leading to the north and south of the country. The first stage cost LE800 million, and the overall cost of the ring road will reach LE202 billion. Work is due to be completed in four years, with an investment of LE350 million a year, including compensation for expropriation of land.

One hundred and forty industrial businesses are being established on either side of the road. Minister of Housing Ibrahim Soliman assured that the ministry was going ahead with its future plans concerning the ring road and other roads linking it with the capital's network. (Photo: Nour Sobieh)



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Bridge over the canal

THE EGYPTIAN National Railroad Company signed a contract last Saturday with a consortium to build a bridge over the Suez Canal connecting the Nile Delta with Sinai. The consortium is led by the German Krupp Stahlbau Hannover, and includes the Belgian Besix and the Egyptian Orascom companies.

To be used by both road and rail traffic, the 600m-long structure will be the world's longest double usage bridge. Located at Firdan, 20km north of Ismailia and 120km northeast of Cairo, the bridge will link the Egyptian railway network to Sinai. It will also provide a road link between the border post of Rafah adjacent to the Gaza Strip and the west bank of the canal.

The original Firdan bridge was destroyed in the 1967 Arab-Israeli war. The new bridge, to be built on the same site, will be designed as a drawbridge so as not to block traffic on the canal. Egypt is financing the project, at the cost of LE226 million. It is expected to be completed in 30 months.

Fanaticism denounced

THE MINISTRY of Awqaf (Islamic endowments) ended its eighth annual conference last Saturday. Entitled "Islam and the future of dialogue between civilisations", the conference gathered Muslims from over 70 countries and various Islamic organisations, with the aim of promoting dialogue and showing Islam as a "religion of tolerance".

Subjects under discussion included the association between Islam and terrorism. The conference also highlighted in the conference's closing remarks, which stated that the accusation of being a force for violence "should not be raised against Islam and no confusion should occur between the right to practise legitimate defence against aggression... and the criminal acts that are committed out of racial or religious fanaticism under the cover of religion". The conference urged Western countries not to give political asylum to Islamist militants.

Addressing the conference, both Sheikh of Al-Azhar Mohammed Sayed El-Tantawi, and Pope Shenouda, head of the Coptic Orthodox Church, stressed the importance of freedom and dialogue with the "other". In a departure from previous years, neither Iran nor Iraq were invited to the conference. Saudi Arabia, although invited, did not attend.

Queen's temple restored

THE PERMANENT Committee for Egyptian Antiquities, chaired by Abdel-Halim Nouredin, secretary-general of the Supreme Council for Antiquities, in coordination with the Polish Council for Antiquities, will continue restoration work at Queen Hatshepsut's temple in Deir Al-Bahari. Meanwhile, Polish archaeologists, affiliated to the Warsaw Museum, will continue restoring the temple of Tobomosis III.

In another joint commission, Egyptian and Greek archaeologists will start excavation work this year at Siwa Oasis in the Western Desert, in search of the tomb of Alexander the Great. The search will begin in an area distant from Gebel Al-Radmi, where most of the area's antiquities are located.

The Permanent Committee has refused a proposal by the American Score Establishment, affiliated to the University of Florida, to examine the Giza Plateau and Sphinx. The proposed work was to include drilling a hole in the Sphinx and inserting a camera to discover if there is water inside the statue.

Officer sentenced

A CAIRO court has convicted police officer Ahmed Abul-Rous of breaking into the home of popular actress Yousra, ending a case that has created a sensation in Egypt. The court rejected prosecutors' demands for a sentence of 15 years imprisonment with hard labour, and instead imposed a one-year suspended sentence and ordered Abul-Rous to pay LE1,500 compensation to Yousra, her maid and her driver. He was also put on probation for three years.

The courtroom had been the scene of violent arguments between the lawyers of each party, which, at times, almost led to blows. The verdict was received by cheers from Abul-Rous and his family. Yousra was not present during the trial or the verdict.

هكذا من الأصل

President Mubarak's chief political adviser, Osama El-Baz, tells **Nevine Khalil** that the resumption of the peace process tops Egypt's agenda in Washington, while US assistant state secretary, Robert Pelletreau, speaking to **Hoda Tawfik**, affirms US commitment to Middle East peace but does not exclude new interpretations of the terms of reference

'We want a commitment'



'Crucial role'



Could you put President Hosni Mubarak's visit to the US in perspective following the recent Arab summit and the Israeli prime minister's visits to Washington and Cairo?

We did not come to Washington in reaction to Prime Minister [Benyamin] Netanyahu's visit. It was agreed upon long ago but was delayed because of the Arab summit, which resulted in a united Arab stand.

Our visit is useful now because it enables us to form and perceive the situation in broader light and not just from an Egyptian or American perspective. In order to formulate a vision of the state of the peace process, you have to gather information and data from all the parties. Netanyahu's visit to Cairo gave the president the opportunity to get a first-hand and detailed description and definition of Israel's policies and how they view things.

It was useful after the Cairo talks to continue action with the US administration at the highest levels for a stronger effect. President Mubarak's visit is an opportunity for the Egyptian viewpoint to be presented to American public opinion and political figures.

Theoretically speaking, we had the choice of paying the visit now or paying it after the elections, but if you wait until the elections are held, you will be losing valuable time for the peace process.

What did Egypt want from this visit, and what is expected from the US in the form of follow-up with the Israelis?

We wanted a commitment to an active US role in the coming few months. It is not enough that they commit themselves to helping or aiding the peace process, but what is important is maintaining an active US role.

Also, confirmation and assurance that US policy on the Middle East peace process has not changed and that it remains stable and steady. It would be natural for the US after this visit to resume its contact with the Israeli government and with the other parties. And hopefully they will be using our ideas and proposals.

How much influence can the US have on Israeli policy?

Although the US role is essential, this does not mean that it can from Israeli policy. It

can't do this, but it has some influence. We have no illusions that it can force Israel to take a certain stand, but we want the US to have a positive influence on the Israeli position.

Do you feel the peace process will be given a back seat during the coming few months in the US because of the elections?

We believe that the US role in the peace process cannot take a holiday for four months, but we also know that the US administration cannot give priority to foreign affairs during election time.

Of course, during election campaigns, both presidential candidates usually concentrate on domestic issues that are dear to the hearts and the pocketbooks of every American voter. Foreign policy does not figure highly unless there is a burning issue, an issue that could develop into a crisis.

Nonetheless, the American voter views the Middle East as an important region for the US from an economic aspect, while the strategic factor does not lend itself to the understanding of the man on the street.

How much influence does the Jewish lobby in America have on US policy in the Middle East?

There is no doubt that the influence of the Israeli lobby — because not all Jews support the Israeli line — here plays a very effective and pivotal role. There's no doubt that the lobby is one of the more important and most potent sources of influence when it comes to US policy in the Middle East.

But to say that this is the only [influence] is erroneous because there are other factors involved like the kind of prestige the Arab side addresses to the Americans, the kind of policies pursued by the Arabs and their position. For example, when the Arabs held their summit in Cairo last June, many Jews and non-Jews felt the Arabs were gaining up against Israel. This shows that the Arab position attracts a lot of attention in the US and the more moderate the Arab positions are, the more they will have an impact in the US.

Do you believe that the shift in Netanyahu's statements when he was in Cairo is a real change of policy?

We have to keep in mind that changes which

occur during these occasions are only partial not absolute. He knows full well that the true crisis lies with the peoples in the region, because in the end he is making peace with the Arabs.

We can only judge whether this change was only verbal or not when we see what happens next. He said he accepts the terms and principles of the Madrid conference, which is a commitment we lend great weight and importance to. Although he did not embrace the land-for-peace formula, it is the essence and at the heart of the Madrid conference.

Another important point is that maybe he had second thoughts about what he said in Washington and the reaction to it in the Arab world. You must understand that sometimes there is a need for high-ranking officials to realise the impact and the consequences of their policies through experience.

Does this mean that Netanyahu is still politically naïve?

No, not naïve, but there is no doubt that his perceptions of peace, how to deal with Arabs, what would be acceptable to them, or the outside world, were not necessarily correct.

What is needed is not someone who comes with firm, definite perceptions from the very beginning, but more importantly someone who is open-minded. Someone who is willing to listen, to give and take, to reiterate his overall commitment to peace as the top priority for Israel.

There was a lot of anger and resentment in Egypt directed at Netanyahu prior and during his visit to Cairo. How did this affect his talks with President Mubarak?

Egyptian public opinion was apprehensive about the policies pursued by the new Israeli cabinet and salt was added to the wound after Netanyahu's visit to Washington.

I believe a factor that influenced the talks more, however, was that Netanyahu realised that if he is to succeed and go down in history as a good Israeli prime minister he will have to pursue peace. He could not possibly want to be the one to preside over a stalemate in peace which will result in instability.

Can the US ally Egyptian-Arab fears concerning the Turkish-Israeli military

agreement?

No, it's not up to the Americans to do that. This is a Turkish-Arab matter, and the Turks have assured us so far that the agreement they signed with Israel is limited in scope. They said it will never amount to an alliance or pact between Turkey and Israel.

Was the renomination of Boutros Ghali for the post of UN secretary-general on the Egyptian agenda in the talks?

This issue of Ghali is not a bilateral issue between the US and Egypt, because he is viewed as an international, not an Egyptian official. We can speak to the Americans on an informal basis on this issue, suggesting that it should be handled in another way. Along with others, the Arab and African viewpoints believe Ghali has done his job well in light of the challenges and obstacles he faced.

What is Egypt's opinion of Iran's overtures over the past few weeks and would it be too high a gamble if relations improve between the two countries?

We made it very clear that these contacts did not lead to anything, and we did not communicate directly with the Iranians.

It is not a question of risk, but the important thing for us is to know that Iran is sincerely seeking to improve relations. So far this has not been demonstrated and up until this minute we still have conclusive and reliable information that Iran has not desisted from helping terrorist groups and operations against Arab countries including Egypt.

Hence we do not find any common ground to talk about regarding improving relations.

But hypothetically speaking, would you say that improving relations between Cairo and Tehran would improve Egypt's bargaining position vis-à-vis the US?

This is not a factor at all, it will not give us leverage with the US. The image of Iran is negative in most countries and I don't think that improving relations will add anything to Egypt's stature.

How can we establish a real link or channel of communication when the setting which is needed for any overture with Iran is not there?

What kind of role does the United States see Egypt playing in the Middle East?

I think that the critical Egyptian role is the role that Egypt has been playing over the past few years as partner in pushing peace in the Middle East, broader peace than now exists, and it is very important that Egypt and the United States consult about how each of us continues this role because both countries are committed to see additional peace negotiations achieve success, and to working toward a comprehensive, just durable and secure peace.

All of those aspects are needed... and it is not by chance that the first two visits the Israeli prime minister has made outside of his country have been to Washington and Cairo.

These have been two key parties in this process. So it is very appropriate that presidents Clinton and Mubarak have the chance to consult face to face and to determine how we work together from here to continue the peace process.

How difficult is it to resume negotiations under Israel's new approach?

It is clear that the statements we heard from Mr. Netanyahu when he was here, that Israel wants peace and wants to continue negotiations with Syria and Lebanon. But perhaps with different approaches. It is also clear that Syria is interested in pursuing peace.

I don't think that the picture should be painted black.

Egypt and the US are going to see if they both can help the parties to resume talks on what we call the northern front, that is, the Syrian and the Lebanese track.

We said each party can come to negotiations with its own interpretation, but the important thing is to come to negotiations and to engage and negotiate in direct bilateral negotiations with the other party. The US will facilitate these negotiations, as an honest broker.

Discussions between Clinton and Mubarak concentrated on what Egypt and America can do to help stimulate that process and achieve progress.

Do you see any possibility of resuming negotiations during the next four months? I don't think our presidential elections are an obstacle to moving forward on the peace process.

Security Council Resolution 242 is re-

cognised as forming the basis for Arab-Israeli peace. How does Washington interpret this?

We can have our own interpretation also. We can say that the important thing is to establish the negotiations face to face, discussing real issues that concern of course borders, treaties, land and security and relations, and how it all gets tied together.

Do you think Syria could possibly participate in negotiations under the Israeli hardline positions?

I think it's got to be studied and spelled out. I have not seen Syria say absolutely no.

Let me draw your attention to the fact that Syria is part of five-nation monitoring group in South Lebanon. It is a smaller subject than total peace. But let us say that on this one issue Syria and Israel both found a way to agree.

Another new factor is the exchange of prisoners and corpses between Israel and the Party of God in South Lebanon.

How does the US look upon Israel's new negotiating approach?

The US has no problem with that. Always each country has its own interpretations and its own positions. We will try to narrow differences.

The important thing is that no one has closed the door. So, there is room for positive work.

Does the US attach greater importance to the issue of terrorism than to the political negotiations?

I do not think that is the case. But I think the primary priority should be peace negotiations and what we can do.

What about the formula of Lebanon first? Is it on the table?

We have seen some Israeli statements referring to it. I think it will need further consultations to determine whether some approach along that line could be productive because it has to take into account Syria. We cannot ignore Syria.

The American position is that Syria has to be involved in any approach on the northern front because it is a partner.

A joint American-Egyptian advisory council is wooing US investment in Egypt. Gamal Mubarak, a prominent member of the body, spoke to **Nevine Khalil** in Washington

Big plans for business

Since January's cabinet reshuffle, the Egyptian economy has witnessed a wide-ranging economic reform, which aims to attract foreign investors and boost exports. The Presidents' Council, a joint American-Egyptian advisory body to presidents Hosni Mubarak and Bill Clinton, is believed to be behind much of the new legislation.

In Washington on Tuesday, the council reported to President Mubarak and United States Vice-President Al Gore, its co-chairman, informing them about its achievements over the past months, its plans for the future and 10 mega-projects which will be presented to the upcoming economic summit to be held in Cairo in November. If approved, the projects are expected to double US investment in Egypt over the next two years.

At a dinner which followed the council meeting, Mubarak said, "At this stage, we are entering the second phase of our reform programme with an economy in good financial health. The budget deficit has been reduced to less than one and a half per cent of GDP. Our goal is sustainable and equitable growth. To achieve that, high investment rates, high productivity growth and high export growth are required."

Mubarak said that regional cooperation "is a must" for Egypt in a world of regional economic blocks. "It will be the first layer in cementing cooperation in the Middle East and the Mediterranean region. In this context, the forthcoming Middle East economic [summit] conference to be held in Cairo takes on a special significance. It will build on the momentum for political and economic transformation taking place in the Middle East."

Mubarak revealed that Egypt expects to sign an agreement that would establish "a free trade area" between Egypt and the European

Union. But he expressed regret at the low level of US investment in Egypt which he said "has fallen short of our expectations." At present, he added, US investment amounts to only four per cent of total investment... the current investment climate in Egypt warrants a much higher level of US investments.

After the council meeting Vice-President Gore said that with the positive changes in the Egyptian economy, "a lot of business people take a new look at Egypt and say that now is the time to invest." He said that the coming economic summit in Cairo will be "a very exciting event. The whole world is going to come and see the results of all these changes that are under way... a new day is dawning on the Egyptian economy."

Ibrahim Kamel, head of the Egyptian side in the Presidents' Council, believes that since the advisory body presents issues that have to be addressed and uses "logical and proper arguments, the government is willing to implement changes."

The Egyptian side has concentrated on the reform of economic legislation in Egypt. It has encouraged the increased involvement of the private sector in infrastructure projects and in developing the northern part of the Gulf of Suez. This year banking laws were reformed to allow major international banks to own more than 50 per cent of their bank operations in Egypt, and in the next few weeks the Supreme Council for Exports, chaired by President Mubarak, will meet.

"Mubarak has made it very clear that he does not want to see red tape causing delays in Egypt," Kamel said. There are many more goals to be achieved, including improving the court system concerned with commercial disputes, which currently suffers from the burden of se-



The joint press conference was noteworthy for the warmth the two leaders showed to one another

rious backlogs. "Pressing for a fast track for dispute handling is an item we are currently working on," Kamel said.

James Brewington, head of the American side in the council, agrees. He said it is important for foreign companies to realise that "when disputes arise, they will be resolved quickly." Brewington is pleased to see obstacles hindering investment and economic reform being removed from the Egyptian system, although he feels that there is still much work to be done. "To say that there aren't other obstacles that we need to work on would be a lie," he said. However, he did make the point that the Egyptian market is a "very robust market that in itself is something that may not always be understood."

Another member of the American side, Paul Hollowell said he believes the council has been "very positive and effective." He said he joined the Council only after he felt "that the Egyptian government was serious" about economic reform. But he criticised what he described as "the over-involvement of the public sector" in the Egyptian economy. "Only when you unleash the private sector do you unleash economic development," Hollowell said.

Since an active economic relationship between Egypt and the US was initiated in 1973, economic ties have revolved around economic aid from the US and furthering cooperation in the fields of petroleum and banking. US investment in Egypt, however, remained around \$1 billion for many years.

"Then came industrial projects which had a totally different flavour," said Mohamed Shafiq Gabr, an Egyptian member of the council. "Now we have another \$1 billion of US investment." Gabr believes that the council's "mission is to put Egypt on the world map for investment." Although the immediate results are not apparent and action only took place at the beginning of this year, Gabr sees that time was "well spent in laying down the terms of reference, getting to know each other and identifying our goals."

Brewington agrees. "I knew it was going to be a difficult road, but in the last six months we have seen tremendous progress," he said. Still, more improvement is needed in the area of telecommunications, he feels, because "the world of data and the Internet is critical to Egypt's future." Egypt should also move more swiftly in areas of reform, especially in intellectual property rights, which are "extremely important," Brewington said.

Recently, the Egyptian side of the Presidents' Council ran into trouble in Cairo with local pharmaceutical manufacturers. The announcement that the council wanted to study the possibility of enforcing patent rights for pharmaceutical products was met with loud protests from Egyptian manufacturers who claimed that medicine prices would rocket and become unaffordable for the average citizen. Egyptian manufacturers would lose a lot of money if such a move was implemented. The council backed down temporarily because "it was not our number one priority," Kamel explained.

Kamel believes that although there will always be a need for a more liberalised market economy in Egypt, most of the "serious impediments" for investment have been got out of the way. "Now what we are working on is making Egypt the best place on earth for foreign investment," he said.

Advisers not lobbyists

Accompanying President Hosni Mubarak on his current visit to the United States are the Egyptian members of the Presidents' Council, a joint US-Egyptian body formed a year and a half ago to promote business relations between the private sectors in America and Egypt. The council, co-chaired by Mubarak and US Vice-President Al Gore, includes, on the Egyptian side, businessmen representing associations like the Egyptian Chamber of Commerce and the Egyptian Federation of Industries. The partnership is aimed at enhancing US investment in Egypt and raising the level of trade between the two countries.

Gamal Mubarak, a member of the council's Egyptian team and President Mubarak's younger son, told *Al-Ahram Weekly* that one of the main factors which spurred the partnership into being was the realisation that US investment in Egypt is quite low. "We have been trying to address some of the policy issues that impede foreign, and particularly US, investment," he said.

Al Gore's visit to Cairo in January this year contributed to progress on issues being addressed by the council. Following the visit, "the government decided to open up infrastructure projects like power generation and road building for the private sector," said Gamal Mubarak. Foreign investment can, therefore, now play a bigger role in the improvement of Egypt's infrastructure.

"There has also been reform in the banking sector, and a law was passed in parliament only a few weeks ago to lift restrictions on foreign ownership of Egyptian banks. This again should open up the field for US investors," he stressed.

Gamal Mubarak believes that the Presidents' Council has acted as a "catalyst" for some of Egypt's recent economic reforms. "We made some recommendations and suggestions on the best way to handle [economic reform]. But obviously it's up to the government at the end of the day to decide how best to proceed," he said.

During the Egyptian president's present trip to Washington, the council is reviewing advances made over the past seven months towards a more investment-friendly climate in Egypt. Objectives now are to attract the attention of American multinational companies and encourage Egyptian exports.

Some have criticised the council for being too close to the executive powers, but Gamal Mubarak pointed out that the council only has an advisory role. "This means you basically research certain issues and, in doing so, you get the viewpoint of the business community at large. We come up with certain recommendations, but this does not mean they will be carried out," he explained. "Some people have a misconception that we act as a pressure group on the government. We are purely an advisory body with a specific task which was laid down when the council was first established."

But is the council detached from the man on the street? "Our job at this point is not to link up with the man on the street... We are not a decision-making body," Gamal Mubarak replied. It is the government's task to meet the needs of the people, he emphasised.

Gamal Mubarak is confident that Egypt will not be pressured by the Americans into making changes in its economy which would be unrealistic or inappropriate for the speed of liberalisation which Cairo desires. "Nothing has been raised over the past year or so, in terms of changes in economic policy, that was new to us," he said. "Most of the issues on the table have been discussed and it has been just a matter of accelerating the rate of certain reforms in certain areas at the right time. Some people might disagree, but over the past five or six months a lot of right decisions have been taken to make investment [in Egypt] more attractive."

Radar screen view

Robert Rifkind, the president of the influential American Jewish Committee, can be blunt. "I haven't heard anything yet that makes me think [Israeli Prime Minister] Bibi Netanyahu has left the path of progress towards peace," Rifkind told *Al-Ahram Weekly*. Asked if he could explain the discrepancy between statements Netanyahu made in Egypt and in America, Rifkind supposed, "I don't mean to sound cynical, but I think every politician is sensitive to the needs and interests of the audience he is talking to."

Rifkind met President Hosni Mubarak in Blair House, Washington. "I thought it was an extremely friendly meeting. He is a warm and charismatic man. I have been to many diplomatic meetings. My

meeting with Mubarak was not chilly or cold or in any sense a hostile meeting. It was a warm meeting, and I thought that was significant. Mubarak clearly wanted [the Jewish leaders] to understand the depth of his commitment to the peace process. He spoke about it with genuine passion, without worrying too much about the mechanics, the details or the tactics. He wanted us to understand that he wanted the peace process to succeed," Rifkind said. "Mubarak made some suggestions in response to questions from us — on Hebron, redeployment and the closure of Gaza. All that was offered was in very good spirit and with a good deal of encouragement."

Rifkind continued: "Mubarak discussed his meeting with Netanyahu, and I came away with the im-

pression that he was encouraged by that meeting. I gathered that Netanyahu phoned him just before Mubarak left Cairo for Washington. Obviously, effective lines of communication are developing."

Is the American Jewish community more comfortable with Netanyahu at the helm in Israel? Rifkind was curt, cutting the inquirer short. "To be frank, I think it is an illusion to think that American Jews are in a good position to assess who ought to be the prime minister of Israel. There are too many issues involved which do not rise to our radar screen. A lot of politics is collecting garbage and paving roads," Rifkind chuckled.

But was it not true that Netanyahu won because he was running on the security card? "I'm not quite

so sure, given the closeness of the victory, that one could say that there was not a significant purely domestic component. I do not for a minute mean to demean the imperatives and importance of security and peace, but I don't think one can ignore the significance of what to us seem to be relatively trivial domestic issues," Rifkind stressed.

"This may shock you, but a poll we took a year ago showed that the majority of American Jews did not know that Netanyahu and Shimon Peres were not of the same party. So Americans, including American Jews eagerly and actively concerned about Israel, do not follow the daily nuances of Israeli partisan politics. Generally speaking, American Jews wish the elected head of the Israeli gov-

ernment to succeed. Sometimes he may do things that distress us, but generally speaking we want that government to succeed," Rifkind said.

"Netanyahu committed himself, whether he likes it or not, to living up to the Oslo Accords, and has committed himself to pursuing the peace process. So what it boils down to is a question of tactics, details and what will best bring us to the desired result — which, as President Mubarak said, is a comprehensive peace in the Middle East. No one in a democratic society can remain in office long if he is not deeply concerned about the electorate's sense of security," Rifkind said.

Interviewed by **Nevine Khalil**

The cost of reform

The IMF's recipe for economic reform has yielded some positive results, but not without exacting a cost from those least capable of paying it, writes **Mohamed Abdel-Shafel' Eissa**

The so-called orthodox theory of economic reform embraced by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank, is based on two main concepts. The first calls for reducing the monetary expansion rate by decreasing public expenditure, thereby lowering the budget deficit and stabilising prices. The second requires the deregulation of national economy through a drastic and comprehensive withdrawal of government from the production sphere.

In order to realise these objectives, the IMF recommends that countries seeking to implement economic reforms adopt two courses of action: the first being liberalisation and the second, a depreciation of the foreign exchange rate of the national currency.

According to the 1991 agreement signed between Egypt and the IMF, the Egyptian government has implemented the IMF's recommendations so as to capitalise on the organisation's facilities and the debt-relief measures offered by the Paris Club members.

Over the past five years, the country's economic reform and structural adjustment programme has yielded both positive and negative results.

On the positive side, figures recorded in the 1995 Egyptian Human Development Report (EHDR), which is published annually by the Institute for National Planning, reveal that the budget deficit, as a percentage of gross domestic product (GDP), has fallen from 17.2 per cent in fiscal 1986-87 to 6.8 per cent in fiscal 1992-93. This decline is mainly due to a sharp drop in government expenditure, especially in the case of subsidised goods. In 1982, subsidies accounted for 35.7 per cent of

government expenditure, but by fiscal '94, this figure had been slashed to 7.3 per cent. It is also a result of a substantial increase in the government's revenue, primarily from collecting income and sales taxes.

The EHDR also shows that the balance of payments deficit has decreased over the last few years, partly as a result of a 30 per cent devaluation of the Egyptian pound in 1991. As a direct result of the devaluation measures, revenue from worker remittances and tourism increased, thereby helping reduce the "trade balance deficit," as well as the services balance deficit," stated the report.

It also notes that the inflation rate has witnessed a sharp decline, with the "rate of increase in the consumer price index (CPI)" falling from about 21 per cent in the 12 months prior to July 1991, to about 10 per cent by October 1993.

However, despite the positive signs reflected in what seems to be a fiscal equilibrium, policies accompanying structural adjustment measures have generated some negative results viewed by economists and policy makers in different ways. Some argue that the negative side effects of these so-called economic reforms might better be perceived as the national, and temporary, cost of the reforms undertaken. In this light, it is only a matter of time before the economic and social hardships encountered along the road to sustainable development are brought to an end.

Others maintain that the fiscal balance realised cannot be appreciated since this balance must be viewed merely as an instrument for achieving concrete objectives such as a growth with redistribution that goes hand-in-hand with raising the stan-

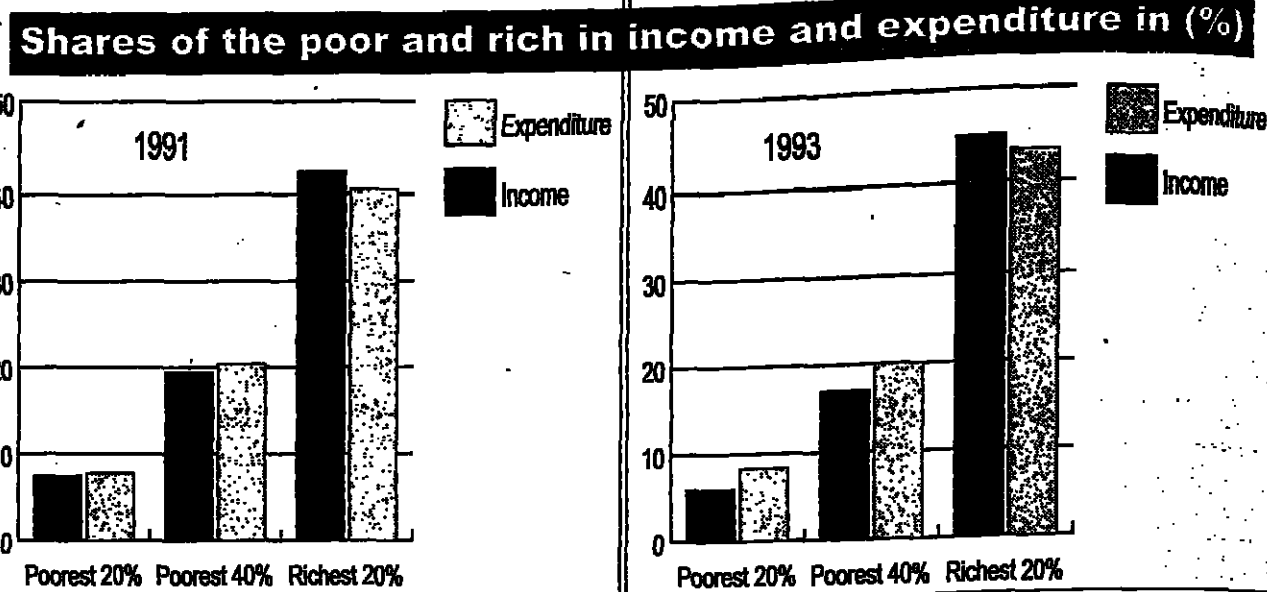
dard of living for the majority of the citizens.

However, regardless of how one views the results, it is clear that Egypt's experience with economic reform has brought with it a slow rate of growth and disparity in the distribution of income and wealth, thereby expanding the poverty margin in both rural and urban areas.

During the early 1990s the country's economic growth rate, not including the net economic growth which takes into account the rate of demographic growth, ranged between one and two per cent. Similarly, the level of fixed investments declined as a percentage of GDP and, investments as a whole, were unevenly distributed in a way that hurt the agricultural and manufacturing sectors in particular.

Figures reported in the EHDR reveal that the share of gross fixed investment as a percentage of the GDP fell from 28.5 per cent in 1978-82 to about 20 per cent during the current five year plan (1993-97). As a percentage of these aggregate figures, the agricultural and industrial sectors' share dropped from 2.2 to 1.8 per cent and 6.9 to 3.6 per cent, respectively.

Focusing on the social dimension of the reform programme, Egyptian policy makers have attempted to introduce a series of measures aimed at buffering the blow certain segments of the population have suffered as a result of the retarded growth rate and poor distribution of resources, wealth and income. They have veered away from the so-called "shock therapy" policy that prevailed in Eastern Europe, opting instead for a gradual change characterised by initiating price mechanism performance programmes such as reducing the inflation rate and embracing privatisation.



Another vehicle for reform has been the creation of the Social Development Fund (SDF), an autonomous organisation aimed at helping various "targeted groups" such as small and medium businessmen and some high school and university graduates. Its contributions, however, have been small. On average, the SDF, which receives funding through various international donor agencies, has a \$110 million budget and spends about 0.2 per cent of the GDP per year—a negligible sum of money given the size of Egypt's economy. Moreover, even if the SDF was to direct all of its activity toward helping the poor, poverty would in no way be abolished given its limited budget.

There are other public programmes, however, which target the lower-income brackets such as direct consumer subsidies and the social security system. While subsidies have been mainly confined to staples such as bread, the social insurance pension is aimed at the lower-income households comprised of civil service and some public and private sector employees, as well as those who are at a disadvantage

due to gender, age, or disability.

The EHDR notes that social insurance programmes such as social security and the Sadat pension scheme may be adequate in terms of coverage, but fall far short of the mark in terms of average cash payments per household. Given such a realisation, is poverty in Egypt on the increase or decline?

The social element of the development programme focuses primarily on eliminating poverty, not just alleviating it. This implies that all basic social and economic needs are met. But, to eliminate poverty, two prerequisites must be met. First, self-sustainable development must be based on the expansion of the industrial sector, increasing productivity and the implementation of a realistic incentive mechanism. To achieve this, a series of socio-economic, political and administrative changes must be undertaken aimed at realising an equitable distribution of wealth.

In this light, it could be argued that structural adjustment mainly pertains to short and medium-term considerations, and may not be judged using the criteria for long-

range planning. This is partially true, but we must keep in mind that the economic reform and structural adjustment package currently being implemented should have been based on a number of elements that take into account both short and long-term considerations. Therefore, a policy aimed at the poor must have been intended to be an integral part of the reform initiative. And, it is under this lens that the IMF's economic reform recommendations, and the negative impact they had on the poor, must have been calculated prior to the launching of the programme.

According to the EHDR, "There is reason to believe that the gap between rich and poor has widened. Moderate income growth rates, the high unemployment rates, the decline in government expenditures and the free play of market forces without an effective compensatory scheme could have negatively affected the poor and vulnerable groups within the population."

The writer is a professor at the Institute of National Planning.

CIB: sold out

Opening the door for Egyptian companies to enter international capital markets, shares of the Commercial International Bank were received with investor enthusiasm in London last week. **Ghada Ragab** reports

Shares of the Commercial International Bank (CIB), the first Egyptian shares to be offered on a foreign stock exchange, found a warm welcome on the London Stock Exchange.

About four times oversubscribed, the \$120 million worth of shares brought in offers for \$500 million. CIB's Managing Director Adel El-Labban, who toured 11 countries to promote the offering in the Gulf, Europe and the United States, said the success of the offering has positive implications for the Egyptian economy.

"The offering is a landmark transaction for Egypt and maintains CIB's record of leading the development of Egypt's capital markets," El-Labban said.

The shares were offered in the form of Global Depository Receipts (GDRs). Each GDR is equal to one tenth of a share and fetched \$11.875 each. CIB shares were trading at LE420 on the Cairo Stock Exchange last week.

ING Ratings, the offerings global coordinator, has been granted an option to purchase an additional 1.2 million GDRs.

GDRs generally are receipts representing a certain number of shares, and are issued by non-US companies outside the US but can be exchanged on US markets. GDRs are mainly useful for investors in emerging markets, because they hedge against risk and problems of liquidity.

The demand on the GDRs, which were offered to institutional investors, was diverse. About 40 per cent came from the UK, 10 per cent from continental Europe, 40 per cent

from the US, 8 per cent from the Middle East and 2 per cent from the rest of the world.

The shares offered belong to the National Bank of Egypt, a major public sector bank and previously CIB's majority shareholder. The offering reduces NBE's holding in CIB to 22.6 per cent, representing one more step on the road towards privatising CIB.

"The interest of the international investment community in CIB demonstrates the growing importance of Egypt as an emerging market, and the offering signifies an important step in the development of Egypt's access to international investors," said NBE Chairman Mahmoud Abdel-Aziz, who is also chairman of CIB.

Since 1992, when NBE held about 99 per cent of CIB shares, NBE has sold some of the shares to employees, offered a portion in a public share issue and increased the bank's capital, all of which have amounted to a process of gradual privatisation of the bank.

Divesting the holdings of public sector banks in joint ventures, one of the objectives of the economic reform programme, is proving to be an elusive task. Despite pressure from the international financial institutions which support the reform programme, such as the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank, most banks have not been able to push ahead with this task. Only small portions of a few banks have so far been sold off. The successful privatisation of CIB, therefore, credits NBE for braving a road which others have been reluctant to pass through.



The Riviera, situated between Taba and Nuweiba, is an attractive area to investors

Trail for two

AFTER two months of litigation, two investors won a lawsuit against the Ministry of Tourism (MOT) over the ministry's decision to confiscate the land they were allotted to develop south of Taba in Sinai, reports **Rehab Saad**.

Two months ago, the MOT confiscated property allocated to Wagih Sing and Khaled Fouad, claiming that the two investors were neither serious about, nor capable of completing by the December 1996 deadline the development projects they had proposed several years ago. The plaintiffs, however, charged that the MOT, by confiscating the land before the set deadline, was in violation of the agreement signed between the two parties. Mustafa Abu Zeid, the counsel for the plaintiffs, argued that the Tourist Development Authority (TDA), an MOT affiliate responsible for allocating lands to investors at a nominal price, had agreed to hand over the land to the two investors on the condition that they submit a feasibility study and blueprints for their proposed project. Once these documents were approved by the TDA, he noted, it is unlawful to annul the contract before the end of 1996. According to Abu Zeid, both investors agreed to the terms of the contract and notified the TDA of such in December, 1995.

However, the TDA argued in a report it prepared about the cases that the investors seemed to be stalling and would not be able to complete the projects by the deadline. "We don't confiscate lands," said Mamdouh El-Beltagi, the minister of tourism. "We, in fact, stop some people from monopolising the land in order to give others a chance to launch serious development projects... Therefore, if any laxity is proven, we annul the contract to prevent any kind of monopolisation from taking place."

According to El-Beltagi, TDA officials met several times with the two investors and, at every meeting, promises were made but never kept. It has now been, he said, seven years since the contract was signed and the plans approved, and the projects are far from being completed in this light, the TDA acted to confiscate the lands.

The trial takes on a special light given the TDA's efforts in the mid to late 1980s to expand tourism projects in Sinai by allocating land to investors for development. The verdict is seen by investors as a point in their favour in terms of protecting their rights and investments defined under Law 230 of 1989 which prohibits the nationalisation or confiscation of a project without a legal verdict having been handed down.

Power plant

ITALY'S Ambassador to Egypt Francesco Aloisi de Larderel, and the Upper Egypt director of the Egyptian Electricity Authority last week visited a thermal power plant under construction in Assiut. The power plant is financed through a soft loan granted by the Italian government in the framework of a joint Egyptian-Italian project.

Upon completion, the power plant will produce 300 megawatts of electricity and is intended to increase the level of energy production in Upper Egypt. This region is currently witnessing a dramatic increase in industry and requires more autonomous power sources.

The Italian government has earmarked a \$150-million credit line for the project which will produce about 2.5 per cent of Egypt's total electricity production. Similarly, the Italian government will also finance the construction of a power plant in Sharm El-Sheikh through a \$17-million soft loan. The new plant aims to meet south Sinai's rising demand for electricity resulting from an increase in tourism.

World Bank loan

THE MINISTRY of Economy, Trade and International Cooperation recently signed a \$172 million loan agreement with the World Bank. Most of the loan is earmarked for fighting pollution and financing development programmes.

The agreement provided that about \$35 million will be used in assisting companies that can help stem growing industrial pollution in Cairo, Alexandria, Suez and Ismailia.

The International Development Association, a World Bank affiliate, will provide \$120 million of the loan, with the money to be used for financing job programmes and upgrading plumbing and electrical services in low-income areas. The accord also sets aside \$17 million for family planning projects in rural areas.

Canada calling

THE CANADIAN Foreign Ministry, in cooperation with the Arab Businessmen's Association (ABA), recently organised a seminar in preparation for the economic summit to be held in Cairo in November 1996, reports **Mustafa Sami**.

During the seminar, which drew more than 100 Canadian and Egyptian businessmen, Michael Bill, Canada's ambassador to Egypt, stated that there are numerous investment opportunities in Egypt for Canadian companies. He also added that the International Canadian Agency for Development is prepared to finance development projects in Egypt.

Bill noted that the laws ensuing from Egypt's new economic reform programme have resulted in an increase in foreign investment in Egypt and have also prompted the establishment of a number of new companies.

Touching on the upcoming summit, Ahmed Abul-Kheir, the coordinator for the Cairo Economic Summit, spoke about the facilities which Egypt will offer to the participants. According to Abul-Kheir, 400 Egyptian businessmen and 1,200 of foreign investors will attend the conference in addition to 500 experts and foreign journalists.

Market report

CIB dominates trading

AFTER one week of heavy activity on the stock exchange which ended 25 July, the General Market Index closed at 224.91 points, a rise of 6.73 points over its opening level. Over 3.5 million shares changed hands over the course of the week's trading, bringing the total value of transactions to LE533 million — a six-fold increase over the value of trading the week before.

The surge in activity is mainly a result of heavy trading in shares of the Commercial International Bank (CIB). With roughly 1.01 million in shares valued at LE405 million changing hands, trading in CIB's shares accounted for 28.32 per cent of total dealing and 76.10 per cent of the total value of transactions.

Similarly, the manufacturing sector's index registered a 12.64 point increase, closing at 290.17. The increase in the index was mainly due to an increase in the value of Al-Ahram Beverage Company's stock, which gained

LE47 to close at LE67 per share. Shares of the Paints and Chemical Industries Company continued to increase in value,

for Iron and Steel, whose shares gained LE21 to close at LE179.

Topping the list of six companies whose shares declined in value was the Family Cosmetics Company. Its shares lost LE10 to close at LE105 per share.

While the index for the financial and real estate sector gained 27.3 points, it slipped by 3.47 points this week, mainly as a result of an LE2.6 point drop in the share value of El Kahra Housing and Development Company. The company's shares closed at LE24. On a similar note, shares of the United Housing and Development Company dropped by LE2.1 to close at LE15.78. However, the value of the Heliopolis Housing and Development Company's shares gained LE45.95.

In all, the shares of 40 companies increased in value, 17 decreased and 21 remained unchanged.

Edited by **Ghada Ragab**

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Closure tactics

Lifting the closure is in line with Likud's policy of integrating the Israeli and Palestinian economies. But is it a price worth paying, asks **Graham Usher** from Jerusalem

The cautious optimism which prevailed in the Occupied Territories after the meeting in Gaza last week between PLO leader Yasser Arafat and Israeli Foreign Minister David Levy has not taken long to sour. A week after Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu announced in Egypt that he would issue 10,000 extra work permits to "ease the economic plight of Palestinians" in the West Bank and Gaza, his government re-imposed a full closure on the West Bank, pitching 13,000 Palestinians once more into "plight".

The latest closure was a reprisal for a drive-by ambush on 26 July near the Israeli town of Beit Shemesh which left three Jewish settlers dead. No Palestinian militia claimed responsibility for the attack, but Israel suspects it is the work of rogue elements within the PLO's largest anti-Oslo faction, the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP). It also expects the Palestinian National Authority (PNA) to do something about it.

Following the action, the Israeli cabinet issued a statement warning the PNA that it must act against "all terrorist organisations, without any distinction between them", a signal that Likud expects Arafat to be every bit as tough on his PLO dissidents as he has been on his Islamist ones. The alternative is Israel re-instituting punitive measures like a closure hitting Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza where it hurts them

the most — in the pocket.

With unemployment levels of 40 per cent in Gaza and 24 per cent in the West Bank, Arafat may feel he has little choice but to obey Israeli dictates. On 28 July, PNA security forces rounded up several PFLP activists in the Hebron. The next day Israel lifted the closure. Coupled with 17,500 Palestinians from Gaza with permits to work in Israel, the total number of Palestinians now enabled to work in the Israeli economy is 30,000 — the highest figure since Shimon Peres enforced a total closure of the territories in February after the first wave of suicide attacks in Israel.

Israel's tactical use of closure after the Beit Shemesh hit illustrates a crucial policy difference between the new Likud government and its Labour predecessor. For Labour, closure was justified not only as a "security" measure, but as an eventual political solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict based on demographic separation of the two peoples. For Likud, closure is neither a security nor political remedy. "Closure doesn't prevent terror attacks," says Likud Knesset member and former Shin Bet officer, Gideon Izra. "In the last few years, no Palestinian with a work permit has been connected with terror attacks. Closure is simply a means of punishment."

Netanyahu, too, has stated publicly that his government's

maintenance of the closure is due to the "breakdown of security conditions" posed by the Oslo process. Nor is separation an idea for which he has "any particular affection". Many members of his coalition concur. Permanent closure — especially one whose "separation" runs along the old green line between Israel and the Occupied Territories — suggests the future emergence of two states, a prospect to which Likud is ideologically opposed. It also denies Israel a vital means of economic control over the territories and therefore of political leverage over the PNA. These are boons which Netanyahu has already shown he is unwilling to give up.

In addition to re-opening Israel's labour market to 30,000 Palestinians, last week Israel's Interior Ministry announced that it would deport all illegal migrant "guest workers" employed in Israel. Drawn largely from Eastern Europe and Southeast Asia, Israeli government sources estimate that there are around 200,000 foreign migrant workers in the Israeli economy, half of whom are illegal and most of whom are performing low grade jobs once performed by Palestinian from the territories.

Should such jobs become once more available to Palestinian workers, it would — says the UN special coordinator for the West Bank and Gaza, Terje Larsen — amount to the biggest boost to the Palestinian economy since the closure was

imposed. "We estimate that each Palestinian working in Israel supports 10 people," says Larsen. Thus, "for every 1,000 Palestinians who get jobs in Israel, 10,000 experience an improvement in their living conditions."

There is international and Arab pressure on Israel to lift the closure and for good reason. Work in Israel would generate much needed revenue for the PNA. It would also enable donors to shift their funding away from running costs and short term make-work schemes (where most international money is currently spent) and onto investment in infrastructure. For Israel, too, there are sound economic reasons for lifting the closure. Unlike foreign workers, Palestinians not only earn their wages in Israel but given Israel's domination of the West Bank and Gaza's economies they also tend to spend them on Israeli goods.

The danger is that such a reintegration of the Israeli and Palestinian economies will come at a price. It was revealed after the Beit Shemesh attack that Likud is prepared to improve the economic well-being of Palestinians in the Occupied Territories but only on condition that Arafat assure its security and, ultimately, political agenda for the autonomy. Given the chronic state of the Palestinian economy, the fear is that the current PNA leadership will believe it is a price worth paying.

Bread is a red line

When Netanyahu comes to Jordan, the economic dimensions of peace will top the agenda, reports **Caroline Faraj** from Amman

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's image among his Arab "partners in peace" seems to have undergone some change since his election on 29 May. Some suggest this is especially true after his talks in Cairo with President Hosni Mubarak and Jordan's Prime Minister Abdul-Karim Kabariti's visit to Israel a couple of days earlier.

Although Arab countries reacted differently to the results of the Israeli elections, they agree that the peace process must continue with the attainment of comprehensive peace as its final objective.

In a few days, Netanyahu is expected to visit Jordan, his first trip to the country since he was elected prime minister.

Jordan's Minister of Information Mawwan Muasher told *Al-Ahram Weekly* on 27 July that Jordan is ready to discuss with Netanyahu "all issues related to the peace process including the implementation of the peace agreement between Jordan and Israel".

"We will present the Arabs' views on Netanyahu's policies, which focus on the importance of continuing the negotiations as soon as possible on all tracks," Muasher stated.

"Peace is irreversible, but time is very important on all fronts. Therefore, all parties must sit at the negotiating table," he added.

Jordan's Prime Minister Kabariti was quoted as saying "Everything Netanyahu says is negotiable... and both sides want to negotiate to see how many concessions they can get to reach a balanced peace," he added.

"While we agree with Netanyahu that there can be no peace without security, security cannot be attained without a just and comprehensive peace," said the prime minister.

After his visit to Israel on 16 July, Kabariti announced that he had received assurances that Netanyahu will honour commitments to the Palestine Liberation Organisation to pursue peace in the region.

"We also feel that we are committed to the agreements signed by Jordan and Israel, the agreements with the Palestinians, the Egyptians, and we hope that others will follow very soon," added Kabariti.

Meanwhile, Taher Edwan, a Jordanian political writer, said that Netanyahu's visit to Jordan after Cairo will shed more light on the prime minister's intentions. "But the talks are not expected to change the Israeli government's stand vis-à-vis the occupied Arab lands," he noted.

"Therefore, the Arabs should realise that Israel's reversal of its policies from peace



Lebanese residents walk through Beirut's famous Al-Hamra Street, swamped with posters of candidates for parliamentary elections which will begin on 18 August (photo: Reuters)

to war should be met with an equal and more forceful, collective Arab position that would force Netanyahu's government to shift back to the right track that leads to peace," Edwan concluded.

An Arab diplomat said that "Following his upcoming visit to Jordan, Netanyahu should be ready and willing to meet with Arafat and start once again engaging the Syrians and the Lebanese."

"Only if Israel is willing to continue along the path of compromise, based on international legitimacy and UN resolutions, can real peace and security be established," he added.

Jordan is expected to discuss in detail with the Israeli premier the obstacles facing the peace agreement signed between the two countries in 1984.

"Water and trade are also on our bilateral agenda," said Muasher.

Critics have argued that Israel is putting obstacles in the way of Jordan's trade with the Occupied Territories. "We have the right to send our trade to the Palestinians according to the agreements signed between us," said Jordan's Minister of Trade and Industry Ali Abu Al-Ragheb.

Observers believe it is important to clarify the socio-economic dimensions of

peace to Netanyahu during his visit. "People in Jordan must feel that peace is tangible, and the fruits of peace will contribute to the improvement in the quality of life of the Jordanians," the observers said.

In an attempt to lower a JD 150-million budget deficit, the Jordanian government decided two months ago to lift subsidies on bread by the beginning of August. The controversial move was intended to bring in JD 53 million of revenue.

Kabariti has pledged to introduce a plan to cut expenses of various government departments to provide for the remaining JD 100 million deficit in addition to some foreign loans. However, Kabariti's approach has apparently failed to diffuse widespread opposition to his move.

The opposition said that plans to end bread subsidies will bring extra hardship to Jordan's poor whose daily diet consists mainly of bread. Talal Obeidat, a member of parliament, said that "bread is a red line that should not be crossed." "The government should look for alternative solutions to budget deficit problems," he added.

On 21 July, 11 opposition parties, led by the Islamic Action Front, together with unions and women's groups, attempted to hold a sit-in in front of the parliament, but

police quickly sealed off the area.

Kabariti met the protesters outside the parliament gate and said that he was ready to open dialogue with the opposition parties.

The opposition, including some 41 deputies, said that a petition bearing 30,000 signatures protesting the plans has been delivered to Parliament Speaker Saad Havel Srou.

Some deputies began to talk about the possibility of calling for a no-confidence vote in the government because of the price hike.

"We would seek a no-confidence vote if Kabariti went ahead with his decision," said Obeidat.

Kabariti has said that he is not afraid of a no-confidence vote "as long as I am shouldering my responsibility and duty." "I bear the full responsibility according to the constitution. No government would like to lose its popularity, but national interests should top any other consideration," he added.

Opposition parties have vowed to use all means "that fall within the limits of law" to fight the plans, but warned of an "unpredictable public reaction" to the price hike.

'They need us, we need them'

After nearly three years of giving each other the cold shoulder, Assad and Arafat now seem willing to scratch each others' backs, writes **Atef Sakr** from Latakia

It only took a Palestinian official accompanying Arafat on his first official visit to Syria since the signing of the 1993 Oslo Accords a few words to sum the reasons behind the Palestinian President's trip. "They need us and we need them," he said. The accord, concluded without the coordination between the two parties that Syria had expected, has long been at the heart of the Syrian-Palestinian rift.

The mutual need for coordination between Syria and the Palestinians emerged after Benjamin Netanyahu's election to office in June and his rejection of the land-for-peace formula. But efforts to forge a united Arab stance vis-à-vis the peace process took shape in the Cairo Arab Summit in June, where Syria's Hafez Al-Assad and Arafat agreed to meet later to discuss the latest developments and their impact on the peace process.

Nevertheless, this mutual need for coordination does not hide the fact that several points of contention remain. Arafat still anticipates continuing negotiations with Israel on the basis of the Oslo Agreements. Syria, however, deems these agreements unsatisfactory and in violation of UN Security Council resolutions 242, 338, 194 and 227. These resolutions pertain to the illegal occupation of Arab land and the Palestinians' right of return.

The Syrian position is strengthened by the fact that the Palestinians have so far been unable to secure the rights underscored by international legitimacy. Additionally, the 10 Palestinian factions opposed to the Oslo accords, whose headquarters are in Damascus, share Syria's views. Further fuelling the flames is the refugee issue which is yet to be resolved and that Israel remains illusive about the definition of an emigrant as well as the number of emigrants allowed to return.

Members of the Palestinian delegation accompanying Arafat to Syria told *Al-Ahram Weekly* that the Palestinians and the Syrians have agreed to coordinate the stance with regard to the Golan and the final status negotiations. However, the Syrians have doubts as to how committed Arafat is on these points, and believe that he may back down if his interests are jeopardised.

The Syrian media has picked up on this point when covering the Assad-Arafat meeting. Arafat was referred to as head of the PLO, not as the Palestinian president or head of the limited autonomous rule areas. In addition, Arafat was received and seen off by Syrian Foreign Minister Farouk Al-Shara' at the airport, and waited

for six hours before Assad met with him and his delegation. As a final statement, Syrian newspapers published news and pictures of Arafat's departure in the next-to-last page.

The implication behind these statements and actions are that for relations to return to normal between the two parties, Arafat must coordinate his efforts with other branches of the PLO rather than risk alienating them by only meeting with Fatah, from which the PNA draws some of its rank and file.

In this light, as a gesture of good faith to Syria, Arafat voiced no objections to Farouk Al-Qaddoumi's meeting with various rejectionist Palestinian factions in Damascus. Al-Qaddoumi, who heads the PLO's political department in Tunis, travelled from Latakia to Damascus where he met with George Hawatmeh, leader of the Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine (DFLP) and Khaled Al-Fahum, a Salvation Front (SF) representative. The SF is an umbrella organisation that includes the Palestinian Liberation Front, Ahmed Jibril's Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP), the Fatah Intifada movement and the Revolutionary Communist Party.

A Palestinian source told the *Weekly* that Al-Qaddoumi discussed the results of the Syrian-Palestinian summit with the leaders of the Palestinian factions in Damascus. He proposed a revision of internal Palestinian affairs through a comprehensive dialogue between all sides.

The source also stated that the aim of this policy revision was to create a platform for the Palestinian National Council's 20th session, which is to be entitled, "The Programme of Palestinian National Consensus". This platform will express a willingness to negotiate, on the basis of international legitimacy and UN resolutions, the issues of Jerusalem, settlements, the right to self-determination.

It is obvious that Arafat now needs the support of the rejectionist Palestinian factions. Given that their views are in line with Syria's it is also obvious why Arafat needs Syria now more than before.

Arafat is beginning to play the role of a mediator between Syria and Israel in a bid to encourage the Syrian side of this political symbiosis. The same source told the *Weekly* that he was carrying Syria's reply to the message he conveyed from Israeli Foreign Minister David Levy to Al-Shara'. The Syrian foreign minister, however, neither confirmed nor denied whether he had received a message from Levi during his meeting with Arafat.

Turkey's conflicting signals

Erbakan has lived up to his pragmatic reputation at the expense of Arab expectations, reports **Samia Nkrumah**

According to reliable sources in Turkey, Israeli Defence Under-secretary David Ivry postponed his visit to Turkey this week at the request of Turkish Prime Minister Necmettin Erbakan. Ivry was due to sign a follow-up to the February military agreement between Turkey and Israel.

The new agreement will cover technology transfer, training and weapons production. Israel will also undertake to modernise Phantom F-4 fighter jets for Turkey.

The delay of the signing was intended to neutralise Arab sensitivities about Turkey's ties with Israel. Nevertheless, military cooperation between both countries continues and the pro-Israeli stance of the Turkish armed forces is proving to be unchangeable. The writing was on the wall when Erbakan refrained from taking any steps to review the February agreement statements. He is still showing no signs of doing so.

Around 79 per cent of Turkey's electorate voted against Erbakan's Welfare Party (Refah) and the Islamic leader cannot afford to risk losing parliament's support by reneging on decisions taken by former governments.

Instead, Erbakan has chosen to irk Refah hardliners. This week, he back-pedalled on Refah's opposition to Operation Provide Comfort, the multinational force protecting Iraqi Kurds from the Baghdad regime, and called for the extension of the force's mandate on Turkish territory. The United States-led force which includes British

and French personnel, set up after the 1991 Gulf War, also has a military coordination centre in Zakho in northern Iraq.

Refah and leftist parties have expressed their disapproval of the force's continued presence in northern Iraq. They believe that it could eventually lead to the formation of an independent Kurdish state in the region and spur on the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK), which has been fighting a separatist war in southeast Turkey.

On 30 July, the Turkish parliament ratified the force's stay for another five months. Expelling Operation Provide Comfort would have marred US-Turkish relations.

In negotiations with the US, Ankara has bargained for modifications to the operation's structure to give the Turkish government greater control. Turkey will increase its officials in the multinational force's Turkish base from four to 12. The US has promised to supply Turkey with electronic control systems to increase its border security and provide better information on the activities of the PKK. US military sources say that the multinational force brings Turkey a yearly revenue of 3.6 trillion Turkish liras (\$44 million), reported the *Cumhuriyet* daily.

In addition, Erbakan called for Tur-

key's exemption from the economic embargo on Iraq if the force remains. Turkey is losing around \$20 billion a year as a result of sanctions imposed on Baghdad following its invasion of Kuwait.

Meanwhile, Ankara is softening its line towards Tehran, albeit surreptitiously. The official Iranian news agency reported last week that Erbakan will visit Tehran during the second half of this month. Reliable sources say that the visit will be linked to a wider tour extending to other Asian Islamic states like Malaysia, Pakistan and Indonesia, to avoid a high-profile rapprochement with Tehran.

By wooing the East and appeasing the West, the Turkish prime minister is primarily concerned with achieving political stability and quelling the Kurdish insurgency. In addition, there is an urgent need for economic recovery to curb high inflation and arrest a persistent budget deficit. Ankara's priorities at the moment are putting its house in order. These priorities are reflected in Ankara's relations with neighbouring Arab states and Israel.

Turkish-Israeli ties go deeper than military cooperation. Turkey was the first Muslim state to recognise Israel when it was created in 1948. Both

countries are considered secular democracies. Turkey is a member of NATO and has a customs union agreement with the European Union. Israel has a free-trade agreement with the EU. Therefore, it makes perfect sense for them to further military and economic ties.

Relations with the Arab states vary according to Turkish security concerns. Turkey has tried to reassure Egypt that its military accord with Israel indicates no sign of hostility towards Israel's Arab neighbours. Jordan, which recently denied reports that it is considering engaging in military manoeuvres with Israel and Turkey, enjoys good relations with Ankara.

Under these circumstances, many in Turkey see no need for Ankara to change its policy towards Israel. Only Syria vehemently opposes the alliance. Turkish President Suleyman Demirel, a moderate right-winger, has been tough on Syria. In a far cry from Erbakan's cautious stance, Demirel was quoted by *Milliyet* daily as saying that Syrian activities create the impression that Damascus is trying to create instability in Turkey and force its neighbour to give concessions on water issues. In June, immediately after Erbakan's assumption of power, the Syrian grand mufti delivered an invitation from Syrian President Hafez Al-Assad for Erbakan to visit Damascus. Arab-Turkish relations are stretched under the weight of the conflicting ideologies of the Turkish leadership.

Limits to democracy

A 69-day hunger strike in Turkish prisons ended this week after the death of 12 detainees. Seven others might face the same fate in the battle to improve prison conditions, reports **Khaled Dawoud**

A last minute intervention by newly-elected Islamist Prime Minister Necmettin Erbakan has reportedly ended the longest hunger strike in Turkish history. Leftist prisoners initiated their "death fast" to protest deteriorating prison conditions.

According to mediators who tried to reach a compromise between the inmates and the government, Erbakan ignored the headline stand of his justice minister, Sevtik Kazan, who had maintained that the strikers had no choice but to surrender or face police intervention to end the strike.

"I don't give a damn about foreign press reports and letters from Amnesty International. I only care what happens in the jails. Turkey is an independent country," Kazan told a news conference during the crisis.

The strike drew some 2,070 prisoners, mostly members of Marxist and leftist radical groups, either fasting or backing the action in 43 prisons across the country. They included 314 prisoners who have been fasting for over two months.

Although the strike officially ended on Sunday after the government responded to some of the prisoners' demands, it left seven prisoners in a critical condition. Erbakan's government was not only bowing to international pressure when it ended the crisis. It also feared the action might spread to include thousands of other prisoners, members of the Kurdish separatist groups, mainly the Kurdistan Workers Party, PKK, who announced their support for the strike.

Pressure on Ankara was reportedly led by Germany and Italy, particularly after sympathisers

to the prisoners' cause in Germany staged a wave of firebomb attacks on Turkish-owned properties there over the past week. There have been 49 arson attacks on Turkish shops, warehouses, clubs and motor vehicles so far this month in Germany.

The strikers demanded an end to the authorities' practice of sending prisoners to jails far from the provinces where their trials take place, thus enabling them to attend their trials, improvement in their treatment while they are being transported and dignified treatment of their relatives during visits.

The compromise reached included the government's agreement to one of the strikers' main demands — transfer from the dreaded high security prison at Eskisehir, in western Turkey. It also accepted to keep detainees pending trial at institutions close to where their trials would take place.

The prisoners' hunger strike has revived widespread concerns about Turkey's human rights record, long stained by documented instances of torture, police beatings and harsh conditions in jails, particularly those that house more than 8,000 prisoners held under laws supposed to curb both Kurdish separatists and Marxists.

The move by the Turkish prisoners, and the strong resistance they showed to the authorities, seemed to underline the limits of Turkish democracy. Fairly free and fair parliamentary elections have proven in Turkey and elsewhere little more than whitewash on what is effectively a military-based authoritarian regime which has little respect for human rights.

Filing past Elephant Pass

Once touted as Tamils, the Muslims of Sri Lanka have suffered at the hands of the Tamil Tigers and have now thrown their lot behind President Kumaratunga, writes **Gamal Nkrumah**

One picks up outlandish lore pretty fast when listening to news coverage of the war in the jungles of northeastern Sri Lanka. Tamil Tigers are called "Freedom Birds" and places have such exotic names as "Elephant Pass". Tigers carrying AK-47s are part-time bird-nesters at game parks. As if the fact that a tropical paradise island is a wretched war zone was not wonder enough, the country has a tendency to name battles after nature. The lore of a landscape honeycombed with caves and sacred lakes, coves and lagoons conspires to camouflage the fact that the war on the island is horrific.

As far as my ministry is concerned we are concentrating our efforts on the 400,000 to 500,000 displaced people in Sri Lanka today as a result of the civil war," said M H M Ashraff, Sri Lanka's minister of ports, shipping, rehabilitation and national reconstruction, in an interview with *Al-Ahram Weekly*. Ashraff attended the Eighth General Conference of the Supreme Council for Islamic Affairs, held in Cairo between 24 and 27 July. He was expressing a kind of restrained anger evoked by the coverage of the civil war in Sri Lanka by the international media. Ashraff is one of two Muslim cabinet ministers in the coalition government of Sri Lanka President Chandrika Kumaratunga.

"There is a difference in approach between the [Kumaratunga] government and previous governments," Ashraff stressed. "Formerly, governments did not give the internal refugees a choice concerning the areas they would like to settle in, but forced the displaced people to return to their home areas. We have allowed dislocated people to relocate themselves. They have the choice for the first time in the country's history to choose where to resettle. We are experimenting in those new areas with model villages. We provide relocated people with all basic infrastructure: roads, electricity, water, cooperative outlets, markets, schools, libraries, places of worship, nursery schools, playgrounds and sports facilities. So far we have built 28 new villages — within a period of two years."

Last week, under air cover and backed by artillery, the Sri Lankan armed forces, set off from their base at Elephant Pass — a commanding spot which separates the Jaffna Peninsula from the Sri Lankan mainland — southward toward Kilinochchi, the new headquarters of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE). Army troops filed past the garrison towns in the war-torn northeast of Sri Lanka and captured the LTTE stronghold of Paranthan on their way. "The Tigers had an earth-filled bunker and trenches running for 400 metres on either side of the main road," said Sri Lanka's Acting Defence Minister General Anura Kumara Ratwatte, a brother of Prime Minister Sirimavo Bandaranaike. "Tanks did a flanking move and then the infantry mopped up the Tigers in their bunkers."

Sri Lanka's army is a formidable force of some 100,000, but the estimated 6,000 to 7,000 Tamil Tigers are a constant menace and a formidable foe. Robin Raphael, the United States assistant secretary of state for South Asia, confessed in Washington last week that the US has long conducted "modest military training with Sri Lanka". She added that the US sold "no lethal arms" to Sri Lanka. What exactly "non-lethal arms" are remains a mystery. The military authorities of the island nation have been shopping all over the world for weapons to wipe out the LTTE.

LTTE claimed that when it stormed the Sri Lankan army base in the coastal town of Mullaitivu, 60km east of Kilinochchi, two weeks ago, it killed 1,208 government troops. The

battle of Mullaitivu was the biggest ever in the Sri Lankan civil war, surpassing the casualty toll of 754 government soldiers and 700 Tamil Tigers in the four-day battle for the Pooneryn base in November 1993. Mullaitivu came as a shocking warning to the Sri Lankan army that it had to watch its back after earlier successes in Jaffna.

According to government sources, LTTE's latest offensives resulted in the death of only 300 Sri Lankan army troops. But Raul Wickremesinghe, the leader of the main opposition United National Party, has demanded full parliamentary debate on the battle of Mullaitivu. Wickremesinghe has disputed government figures and said that the death toll was very high — over 1,000 Sri Lankan army soldiers. Over 42,000 people have been killed since the Tamil Tigers launched their protracted armed struggle for an independent Tamil Eelam in 1983.

President Kumaratunga warned in an interview with the *Weekly* that the war now consumes no less than one-quarter of her country's national budget. Last week, General Ratwatte paid a surprise visit to boost his troops' morale. He noted that most Tamil Tiger fighters manning the bunkers were actually women — the so-called "Freedom Birds". At the time, fighting was raging in Kilinochchi. International aid agencies, the International Committee of the Red Cross, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and the UN Commission for Human Rights have fled the fighting there. Hundreds of refugees have done so, too. "With the destructive activities of the Tigers, rehabilitation and reconstruction have been very difficult," Ashraff told the *Weekly*. Over 50,000 people have fled the war zones of the northeast since hostilities erupted a couple of weeks ago. The Eastern and Northern provinces are impoverished areas that have to be bailed out in terms of food aid and medical supplies by international relief agencies.

Civilians have borne the brunt of the war as they are often caught in crossfire. Security has been tightened around the island as LTTE terrorist attacks on civilian targets increase. Arbitrary arrests of LTTE supporters are also on the rise. Four Tamil girls fled the fighting in the north and, searching for bridegrooms in Colombo, settled in a house next to Sri Lanka's Constitutional Affairs Minister G L Peris. After two bombs exploded aboard a rush-hour commuter train, police sweeps in the Tamil neighbourhoods of Colombo resulted in numerous arrests. The police were led to the four girls' home. The girls are still in custody. They bribed the policemen with their dowry, cash and jewellery, but to no avail; they are suspected "Freedom Birds". Needless to say, the search for husbands was called off.

July 1996 marked the 13th anniversary of "Black July". It was on 23 July 1983 that a Tamil Tiger commando unit led by someone who went by the nom de guerre of Selakkil ambushed and killed 13 Sri Lankan troops at Thimelwell. In January this year, the Tigers exploded a truck bomb in the main commercial district of Colombo, killing 88 people. A bill providing for the establishment of a National Human Rights Commission was unanimously signed in the Sri Lankan parliament on 9 July.

The war has intensified ethnic conflict in Sri Lanka. The island's Muslims have been at the receiving end too. "The Muslim community of Sri Lanka traditionally formed a link between the Sinhalese majority of the island and its large Tamil minority. This was especially so in the Eastern Province where Muslims did not have serious problems with Tamils until the emergence of the gun culture and Tamil militancy," Ashraff said.



The streets of the Bangladeshi capital Dhaka were submerged in water this week after torrential monsoon rains hit the South Asian region for two weeks running (photo: AFP)

Once touted as Tamils, the Muslims of Sri Lanka's Northern and Eastern provinces have long suffered at the hands of the Tamil Tigers. Their flirtation with LTTE's leader, Velupillai Prabhakaran, turned out to be the beginning of a nightmare; they were soon to discover the Tigers' treachery. While Muslims were performing Friday prayers at the Kattankudi mosque a decade ago, the LTTE attacked, killing over 160 of them in cold blood. The Tamil Tigers also pounced on Muslims at prayer in a mosque in North Central Province. "The only rationale behind such brutal and unwarranted attacks was that the LTTE did not want any Tamil-speaking citizen of Sri Lanka to profess the faith of Islam. So in our perception it was a callous and deliberate attempt to destroy the religious identity of the Tamil-speaking Muslims of northern and eastern Sri Lanka," Ashraff said.

"Most of the Muslims in the Northern and Eastern provinces of Sri Lanka are Tamil-speaking. The Tamil militants, at the beginning of their protracted armed struggle for an independent Tamil Eelam, pressed the Muslims into joining them and appealed to the Muslims to join the secessionist movement on the basis of their shared language. The Tamil Tigers soon turned their guns against the Muslims, who were seen as fifth columnists working in tacit connivance with the Sinhalese majority. After the signing of the Indo-Lanka Accord in July 1987, hundreds of thousands of Muslims in the Northern and Eastern provinces were systematically driven out of their home regions," Ashraff said.

The Muslim elite in Sri Lanka traditionally lived in Colombo and its immediate environs in the Western Province. Most of the historically important Muslim organisations such as the All Ceylon Muslim League and the All Ceylon Moors' Association were headquartered in the capital. There was a residual resentment among Eastern Province Muslims that Western Province Muslims did not care about their socio-economic needs and political aspirations. The Eastern Province was far less developed than the Western Province and the Muslims there were Tamil-speaking — unlike the Sinhalese-speaking Western Province Muslims — and lived in predominantly Tamil regions.

It was against this background that the Muslims of Sri Lanka's Eastern Province took the lead in establishing a new Muslim political party, the Sri Lanka Muslim Congress (SLMC), which was inaugurated in 1980 at Kattankudi, an almost exclusively Muslim town in the vicinity of Batticaloa, Eastern Province's principal city. The SLMC was founded under the chairmanship of Ahmed Lebbe. Today Ashraff is in charge.

"We are Sri Lankans and in a representative cabinet there must be ministers from all the major ethnic and religious groups in the country," Ashraff said. "Sri Lanka's Muslims are working towards the creation of one Muslim majority region in the southeastern reaches of the island — to be carved out of the Eastern Province. The proposed Muslim majority region would incorporate three electoral districts — Kalmunai, Sammanthurai and Pottuvil — encompassing an area of 1,000 square kilometres. About a third of the Muslims in Sri Lanka live in the Eastern Province, one half of whose population live in the proposed new region," he explained.

"However, we are at present working out our strategies to find a solution as to how best the rest of the Muslims in the Eastern Province can be brought under the jurisdiction of the proposed new region. There are considerable numbers of Muslims who reside in the port cities of Batticaloa and Trincomalee who do not want to come under Tamil administration," Ashraff told the *Weekly*. "So there will be a Muslim majority region in the new devolution package, but it will not include all Muslim Sri Lankans. The majority of Muslims in Sri Lanka will still live in predominantly Sinhalese regions."

The Tamil Tigers' attacks are political, as well as military, strategic acts of violence. Mullaitivu was a classic Tamil Tiger political statement. Unprecedented in its ferocity, the government attempt to retake Mullaitivu, code-named Thiruvudra Pahara, was an unusual response. The sad truth is that there is no evidence that the Tamil Tigers can deliver peace. There is plenty of evidence that they intend to continue to wage one of the most vicious of civil wars. "Unless and until that changes, there is no point in talking to them," Ashraff concluded.

Camp David as model?

A plan has been drafted for a US Camp David-style mediation between India and Pakistan. **Eqbal Ahmad** advises Islamabad to say "No, thanks"

Diplomacy does occasionally wear a farcical look, but nowhere more often than in South Asia. During bilateral talks three years ago, India and Pakistan exchanged carefully drafted position papers. These were called "non-papers". An American academic, Dr Stephen Cohen, has followed in this tradition. He is the author recently of a non-plan, labelled the Cohen Plan. It is the subject currently of much interest in Islamabad which has, to the best of my knowledge, not given any thought to a plan of peace with India.

Dr Cohen's is an outline not for a settlement of disputes between India and Pakistan, but for United States sponsorship of a "Camp David process". It offers no clue to American or even the author's thinking on the principles that may guide the agenda of this process. It merely argues that the climate for an American initiative is favourable, that peacemaking in South Asia will be less expensive for the US than was Camp David — which entailed large aid to Egypt in addition to the hefty billions of dollars the US gives Israel — and that it will require patience, bipartisan consensus and a well-reputed American mediator. George Schultz, Michael Armacost and Hal Saunders are mentioned as potential candidates. No mention is made of the disposition or ideas that might shape the work of this White House-based emissary.

The closest Cohen comes to revealing the substance of the initiative he recommends is his model of the Camp David accord. He deems it, as most American policy analysts do, a great success. But was it? Surely, by removing Egypt from the risk of confronting Arab states, it rendered unthinkable an Arab war against Israel? By the same token, Arab states and people became the objects of Israel's ambition and aggression. It was after Camp David that Israel invaded Lebanon, killing 30,000 civilians and maiming thousands more. Israeli forces destroyed the country's ancient villages, towns and capital city Beirut and oversaw the Phalangist massacre of Sabra and Shatila. A portion of Lebanon remains under Israeli occupation, the size of weekly killings and dying — a monument to Camp David.

The Palestinians — the core element in the Arab-Israeli conflict as the Kashmiris are in the Indian-Pakistani conflict — fared even worse after Camp David. The US had pretended to play an arbiter's and guarantor's role; in reality it was on Israel's side. When negotiations between Egyptian President Anwar Sadat and Israeli Prime Minister Menachem Begin deadlocked over the question of unlawful Zionist settlements in the West Bank and Gaza, Jimmy Carter staked his presidential prestige to assure Sadat that Israel would not establish new settlements. The ink had not dried on the Camp David accord when Begin announced the establishment of new settlements. Jimmy Carter protested, verbally and in vain. While massive US aid continued to pour into Israel, it expropriated nearly 60 per cent of Palestinian land and all of its water resources. The augmented harshness of the occupier-rendered life well high impossible for the hapless people of the West Bank and Gaza. Disposition on a large scale was one outcome; the outbreak of the Intifada was another.

The Camp David Accord is viewed, not incorrectly, as the foundation stone of the Oslo and Cairo agreements between Israel and the PLO. Officials, no less than most journalists and scholars in the US, have been offering these, as first steps, toward Palestinian statehood: 1, among others, have argued that Oslo is liable to yield not a Palestinian state, but a state of affairs, heid in the Middle East. Its outlines had already emerged under Yitzhak Rabin and Shimon Peres, Israeli prime ministers who were both viewed in Washington as apostles of peace. Two distinct humanities live in Israel and under its occupation — one Jewish, the other Arab. One enjoys full citizenship rights, the other does not. One claims sovereignty, the other is denied it. One controls the land and its resources, the other does not. They live in separated spaces, one as a free people, the other as a besieged people. These realities become uglier and more complex as new roads, public facilities and institutions are constructed with American aid. They create new facts of apartheid and inequality. It is an awesome tribute to the power of belief that perfectly normal scholars like Cohen offer Camp David as a successful model.

As Washington shows interest in midwifing an India-Pakistan agreement, Pakistan's policy-makers — where are you, where? — ought to reflect on Camp David's example. No two histories are similar, yet analogies help analysis. Egypt and Israel went to war three times in three decades; so did India and Pakistan. Palestine served as a major bone of contention in the Middle Eastern conflict as Kashmir does in South Asia. As Pakistan has done over four decades, Egypt expended much energy posturing and talking about resistance and liberation, while ignoring Palestinians' right to representation and paying scant attention to a changing world environment. As frustrations piled on top of failures, Egypt put all its eggs in the American basket. "Ninety per cent of this problem can be solved by America," Anwar Sadat was fond of saying. Pakistan has been inviting third-party mediation for some time. As a ploy to engage the sympathies of others it has not worked. It is unlikely to serve as a mechanism to obtain even a modicum of justice for the Kashmiris, or peaceable Indo-Pakistani relations. Rather, American mediation may harm Pakistan as it harmed the Arabs.

The US's interests in South Asia are those of a great power: largely economic and part strategic. Moral issues of human rights and self-determination play but a minor role in policy-making. It is self-defeating to get distracted by Washington's professions of virtues and neutrality. Realistic analysis would suggest that in the role of mediator, the US would be keen to bring about peace in South Asia while favouring India over Pakistan and the two states over the stateless Kashmiris. Consider, among other factors, the following:

India is a large market roughly eight times larger than Pakistan; this ratio is reflected in the current volume of American investments in the two countries. India is many times better endowed with natural resources than Pakistan. Also, India is better positioned for rapid economic growth by virtue of educated manpower, infrastructure and standards of skill and literacy. Strategically, it is a large and populous country — in important respects, a counterpoint to China. As a post-Cold War structure of international relations emerges, the US seeks balancing mechanisms to snipe a favourable equilibrium in its relations with China. India can serve this purpose better than any other country in Asia except Japan. For these reasons, Washington has to be more keen to ensure the goodwill and stability of India than of Pakistan.

Nations, realists are fond of reiterating, do not have permanent friends, nor permanent enemies. They only have permanent interests. During most of the Cold War years, the US government saw political Islam as its ally and an adversary of communism. Today the reverse is true: it views Islamic movements the world over with deep distrust and active hostility. Between 1989, when Kashmir's powerful nationalist insurgency began, and 1992, when it developed with Pakistan's help an Islamic character, America's intelligence services supplied their policy-makers with an alarming picture of militant Islam emerging in Kashmir with Pakistani, Afghan and Iranian involvement. This impression of Kashmiri resistance has been reinforced by the proliferation of a score of armed Islamic groups in Kashmir.

Like all paramount powers, the US is a status quo power. In areas where it has interests and influence, it favours stability over change. Kashmir's liberation movement has been perceived in Washington as a destabilising force in South Asia, and this feeling will increase if the movement makes significant gains towards its goal of total separation from India. America sees the Jamat-i-Islami and Jamaat-ul-Ulema's Islamic gaining legitimacy, popularity and armed strength from their role in Kashmir, thus changing the current comfortable balance in favour of the temporal parties of Pakistan. In India, Kashmir's separation could only aid the militant Hindu parties, which have arrived perilously close to power. Their anti-multinationalist posture, as exhibited in the Euron case, has not endeared them to the US. Above all, Kashmir's separation is likely to worsen India's tense communal environment; the Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party and its partners prey ride the anti-Muslim wave. "We cannot afford Bosnia on a second scale," a Washington insider remarked some months ago.

For these and other reasons, Pakistan will be wise to encourage US interests while declining America's mediation in its relations with India. Thanks, but no, thanks! Islamabad's challenge is to explore other, better options. Unfortunately, it does not appear poised to meet it.

Tutsi coup in Burundi

THE PRESIDENTS of Tanzania and Uganda, Benjamin Mkapa and Yoweri Museveni, met in the Ugandan capital, Kampala, this week and decided to convene a regional summit to discuss the deteriorating situation in neighbouring Burundi. Museveni and Mkapa "strongly condemned and rejected" last Thursday's army-led bloodless coup which ousted Burundian President Sylvestre Ntibunganya.

The military coup took place against a backdrop of ethnic conflict. Burundi's ethnic Tutsi-led army overthrew the ethnic Hutu elected president and installed its own ruler, before lifting a curfew in the Burundian capital, Bujumbura. Ntibunganya took refuge at the United States ambassador's residence.

Meanwhile, Burundian television has shown horrific pictures of the bodies of Tutsi who were decapitated by Hutu rebels last week and piled up in the hangar where they had been sheltering. It was reported that at least 304 people — mainly Tutsi — were killed, 150 were injured and 30 were missing after the attack, which took place a few days before the pro-Tutsi coup was engineered. As a response to the massacre, the deposed government called for a national week of mourning.

Both the Hutu president and the Tutsi prime minister condemned the violence. But Burundi's ethnically divided leaders failed to unite at the funeral of the massacre victims. Angry crowds pelted Ntibunganya with stones as he tried to attend the mass funeral. The 40-year-old president, whose two predecessors were assassinated, had to abandon plans to pay his respects to the dead. Tutsi Prime Minister Antoine Ndayoye and hundreds of soldiers from the 12,000-strong Tutsi-dominated army stood passively by and made no attempt to intervene.

Burundi has a similar demographic make-up to neighbouring Rwanda; its population of 5.5 million is made up of about 85 per cent Hutu and 14 per cent Tutsi. The coup was the fourth to overthrow a Burundian regime since the country gained independence from Belgium in 1962.

Tutsi politicians have accused Ntibunganya and his colleagues in the mainstream Hutu party, the Front for Democracy in Burundi, of being apologists for the Hutu rebels waging a bush war against the army. The front is the largest of 12 parties in the government coalition.

Soon after Ntibunganya was ousted, Burundi's Defence Minister Firmin Sindoyiheba announced that the army had installed former President Pierre Buyoya, a Tutsi and widely acknowledged "political moderate", as interim

president for an unspecified period.

Despite Buyoya's promises, Burundi's Hutu do not expect the coup to end three years of violence, in which 150,000 people have been killed. Many Hutu now have a growing fear of Tutsi soldiers. Some 4,000 Hutu in the Tutsi-dominated capital have sought protection at a displaced persons camp.

Buyoya, a 46-year-old army major, said the military installed him as president to stop the killing. Buyoya was instrumental in establishing a national commission that wrote the country's first democratic constitution. Indeed, Buyoya, who was the president of Burundi from 1987 to 1993, is widely regarded as the "father of Burundian democracy", as the secretary-general of the Organisation of African Unity, Salim Ahmed Salim, once put it.

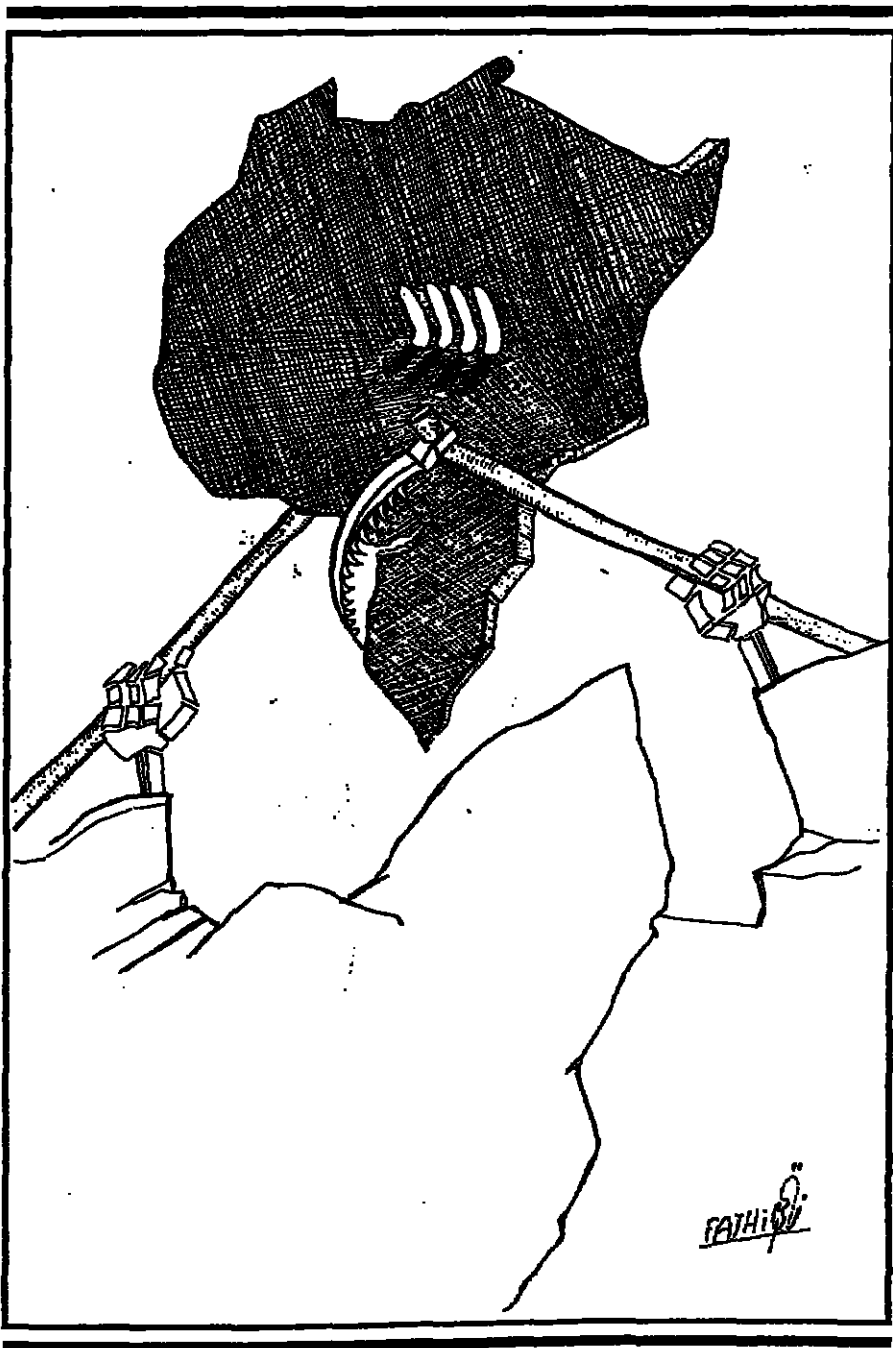
In the 1993 elections, Buyoya lost to Melchior Ndadaye, the first Hutu to become president of Burundi through the ballot. But Ndadaye was assassinated by Tutsi troops in October 1993, triggering a vicious cycle of ethnic violence.

Justifying his instalment as the new president, Buyoya said he wanted to prevent Burundi going downhill. In a Belgian newspaper interview, Buyoya said that a transitional government would be formed in a few days and would be composed almost entirely of civilians. "I will call on personalities from different backgrounds, chosen for their personal competence and for their representativeness, who will come from both communities," he told the Belgian press.

The US has long warned of ethnic conflict in the Great Lakes region of Africa. Former US President Jimmy Carter has spearheaded moves to ensure peace and political stability in the region. White House spokesman Mike McCurry condemned the coup. Nicholas Burns, the US State Department spokesman, said that the US, having played a peacemaking role in Somalia, Haiti and Bosnia, was eager to allow another country to accept that burden in Burundi. America has no strategic interest in Burundi. A potentially risky US-led intervention in central Africa has little appeal for US President Bill Clinton, who is facing an electoral challenge in just over 100 days. Americans are still mindful of the public outrage that followed the killing of 18 US soldiers in Somalia in October 1993.

US officials had hoped that either France or Belgium would accept a leadership role for a possible Burundi intervention, but neither has shown any interest.

Compiled by **Heba Samir**



هكذا من الأصل

An Arab American lobby?

More Arab Americans are political party delegates and leaders than ever before. **James Zogby** outlines the Arab American political agenda for 1996

1996 will be a record year for Arab American involvement in electoral politics. Already, plans are under way to ensure the community's participation in both political parties' national conventions, the election campaigns of President Bill Clinton and his Republican rival Bob Dole, and state and local elections across the United States.

When the Republican and Democratic national conventions meet next month in San Diego and Chicago respectively, a combined number of over 100 Arab Americans will be active participants as delegates or party leaders. More Arab Americans have won elections to party posts than ever before — a reflection of a decade of work by Arab American political activists.

As in the past, this year's conventions will feature major Arab American events in honour of the respective parties. This year's events, however, will be even more prominent than those of previous conventions.

At the Republican National Convention in San Diego, the Arab American reception will take place directly across from the convention centre in a pavilion specially built for the gathering by the Chrysler Corporation.

The Arab American event will be organised by the Arab American Institute, in cooperation with Chrysler and under the sponsorship of Senator Spencer Abraham, who will serve as the event's chairman.

A local host committee of prominent Arab American political leaders and businessmen have worked to ensure adequate funding and community participation in the tribute. Senator Abraham's involvement has guaranteed that the Arab American reception will be well attended and recognised by party officials as a major contribution to the convention.

The fact that this year's Democratic national convention will have the largest number of Arab American delegates is significant in and of itself. Since President Clinton ran unopposed, securing delegate positions was more difficult than in previous years, when Arab Americans could win by running attached to competing candidates. The previous record number of Arab American delegates to a major party convention came in 1988 when Arab Americans were elected as Jesse Jackson delegates. To win this year Arab Americans had to be elected and slated by the Clinton campaign; and thus the large number of those elected reflects the respect given to the Arab American community by Clinton's White House and election campaign.

This year's Arab American event in Chicago at the Democratic National Convention will take place in the Democratic Party's hotel headquarters. Its co-chairs will be the three Arab American Democratic members of Congress: Nick Rahall II of West Virginia, John Baldacci of Maine and Pat Danner of Missouri. Like its Republican counterpart, the event's success will in part be due to the active involvement of Chicago Arab American businessmen and political leadership.

As Arab Americans enter the autumn campaign, their roles will be ensured because both the Clinton and Dole campaigns have sanctioned official Arab American support committees. Arab Americans have been recognised as a constituent group by Republican campaigns since the Reagan campaign established an official committee in 1984. In September 1992 the Clinton campaign organised the first Arab American Democratic support committee. The early recognition and establishment of Arab American support groups this year represents a new breakthrough for the community.

The Arab Americans for Dole Committee will be chaired by George Salem, a Palestinian-American attorney who served as an official in the Reagan and Bush campaigns and was also an official in the Reagan administration.

Already in formation, the Arab Americans for Dole Committee includes dozens of prominent Arab American Republicans in 20 states, including such recognised leaders as Senator Abraham, the committee's honorary chairman, Congressman Ray LaHood, Mitch Daniels, a former assistant to President Reagan, and Victor Attieh, a former Oregon governor.

The Arab Americans for Clinton-Gore Committee is being chaired by the Democratic Arab American members of Congress and an unusually prominent list of Arab American leaders, including five trustees of the party and the president of a major labour union, the United Auto Workers — he is the first Arab American to hold such a post.

The presence of five trustees is itself a significant breakthrough for Arab Americans, since trustees are those who have contributed in excess of \$100,000 to the national party. This year those Arab Americans have already raised in excess of \$1.5 million for the party, evidence of the new seriousness Arab Americans are demonstrating in their national political involvement.

I will be heading the Arab Americans for Clinton-Gore steering committee and coordinating the work of the Arab American Democrats. This group includes 40 elected officials and 28 Democratic Party officials.

This year Arab Americans are central to the Democratic Party's efforts to create a National Democratic Ethnic Coordinating Committee, which is to represent all the ethnic groups in the party. Since the ethnic vote in key electoral states — Illinois, Michigan, Ohio, Pennsylvania and New Jersey — is considered critical to the victory in November, Arab Americans will play a noteworthy role in this year's election. Although it has yet to be formally announced, the Dole campaign will in all probability also form an ethnic council.

As part of their organised effort, Arab Americans will be engaged in local organising, voter registration and voter mobilisation. Already, the Arab American Institute has compiled an Arab American voter data base of more than 550,000 registered voters, with plans under way to update it by registering at least another 50,000 new voters by November.

Targeting the key Midwest states, where more than 40 per cent of Arab Americans reside, will be important to the community's success in establishing itself as a recognised voter group in 1996. This year a record number of 41 Arab Americans are running for state and local positions. In the national race, there is one new candidate for Senate and three new candidates for the House of Representatives, while four Arab American members of Congress are running for re-election.

Richard Lejoub, the current attorney-general of Louisiana, is running for the Senate seat being vacated this year by J. Bennett Johnston. Lejoub is a Democrat who has already won two statewide races by large margins and is one of the favourites to make the two-candidate run-off election in November. Lejoub, who is of Lebanese descent and a strong supporter of the Arab American community's concerns, has gathered support from Arab Americans nationwide.

Congressman Nick Rahall is the most senior Arab American member of Congress. A 10-term representative from West Virginia, Rahall has been at the forefront of national Arab American organising efforts and one of the leading voices in Congress on US-Middle East issues, particularly Palestinian rights and Lebanese sovereignty.

Congresswoman Pat Danner is a two-term Democrat from Missouri who has a long record of public service in her home region. Having defeated an eight-term incumbent in 1992, Danner cruised to victory in the 1994 elections and is considered a strong favourite to win re-election.

John Baldacci, the congressman from Maine's second district, briefly considered an effort to draft him for the Senate race against incumbent Republican William Cohen, but opted to run for re-election in the House. Baldacci has spoken eloquently of his Arab American roots and shown strong growth as a national legislator during his first term in office. Ray LaHood, a freshman Republican Congressman from Illinois, is a veteran of Capitol Hill, having served for four years as chief-of-staff to former House Minority Leader Robert Michel after a career in the Illinois State House. LaHood has been an active participant in the Arab American caucus in Congress and has established a reputation as a diligent and hard-working member of the 104th Congress.

The new Congressional candidates include Democrats Chris John (Louisiana's open seventh district) and Clem Balanoff (Illinois's 11th district) and Republican John Sununu Jr (second district of New Hampshire). Both John and Sununu face primaries in September to make it to the November race in districts where they would have a good chance of winning. Balanoff has already won his primary and faces a rematch with the incumbent, freshman Republican Jerry Weller.

Ten Arab Americans are running for state senates and houses of representatives and 14 more are competing for judgeships in states across the US.

On top of a full electoral programme, Arab Americans are active this year in a range of Middle East peace issues as well.

A major national petition on Lebanon is gathering signatures across the country, from Rhode Island to Michigan to California. The petition — which urges the US to push for Israeli compliance with United Nations Security Council Resolution 425, including withdrawal from Lebanon, and calls for increased levels of aid to help rebuild the Lebanese infrastructure — currently has tens of thousands of signatories.

At the same time, a lobbying effort is under way to get members of Congress not to endorse an anti-Lebanon "Sense of the Congress" resolution and endorse instead a pro-Lebanon bill being supported by Senator Abraham and Congressman Rahall. Arab Americans are also working to build a broad consensus in support of the Middle East peace process.

This is a dangerous time for the Middle East and Arab Americans seek to play a role in speaking to the administration, Congressional candidates and the wider US public about the dangers of the peace process stalling and the steps that must be taken to ensure continued progress towards a comprehensive peace.

While clearly facing challenges beyond their resources, Arab Americans have made remarkable progress towards carving out a role in US politics.

The community has a central role to play in advancing its own social and political interests as an American constituency, while at the same time working to become a bridge of understanding between the concerns of the Arab world and those of the US.



30,000 security personnel and over \$100 million spent on anti-terrorism efforts still could not prevent the rudimentary bomb that shattered the Atlanta Olympics photo: Reuters

Atlanta picks up the pieces

A PIPE BOMB placed near thousands of revellers watching a rock concert in Centennial Olympic Park in Atlanta exploded last Friday killing a 44-year-old Georgia woman and injuring more than 110 others. A Turkish cameraman who rushed to the scene suffered a heart attack and also died.

This is the worst tragedy to hit the Olympics since Palestinian extremists killed 11 Israeli athletes and coaches at the Munich Games in 1972. However, the International Olympic Committee and President Clinton stressed that the bombing should not be allowed to interfere with the Games.

A telephone warning said that a bomb was set to explode in half an hour. But it was just 18 minutes later, as police were investigating a suspicious bag, that the pipe bomb exploded, sending terrified late-night revellers scattering.

"It was as if the ground had opened up and swallowed people — there was just a huge gap appearing in front of us which had been packed with people," said Chris Hankinson, 36, one of the injured.

US President Bill Clinton called the bombing "an act of cowardice that stands in sharp contrast to the courage of the Olympic athletes."

"I believe that people who deliberately kill other people, particularly under circumstances that demonstrate this kind of cowardice... deserve capital punishment," Clinton told the American public.

Foreign leaders were also quick to express their horror and to condemn the attack. In a message to Clinton, French President Jacques Chirac said: "I ask you to convey the feelings of emotion and solidarity of the French people to the families of those affected. In the face of this cowardly act, which nothing could justify, the international community will be unanimous in its condemnation and in its will to strengthen cooperation against terrorism."

The Emir of Bahrain, Sheikh Isa Bin Salman Al-Khalifa, joined those condemning the attack. "The bombing contradicted the ethics and traditions of world society which has sought security and stability and rejected violence and terrorism," he said.

Russian President Boris Yeltsin described the bomb blast as "barbaric" and called for joint international measures to fight terrorism. Presidential spokesman Sergei Medvedev said the bombing again demonstrated the importance of coordinating the efforts of all countries to fight terrorism. He quoted Yeltsin as saying: "It is now essential to adopt a set of joint anti-terrorism measures. Russia is ready for that."

Iranian newspapers took a different line, arguing that the bomb attack in Atlanta exposed a social malaise gripping the United States, which should never have been allowed to host the Olympic Games. "There are more underground groups in the United States than anywhere else in the world, yet Olympic officials disregarded these facts and chose Atlanta as a fit venue for the Olympics," said the daily *Akbar*. The Iranian government, however, has officially condemned the Atlanta bombing. "Such acts of terrorism against innocent people are inhuman and unjustifiable," Foreign Ministry spokesman Mohammad Mohammadi said.

Based on analysis of the voice in the telephone bomb warning, the FBI have said it believes the bomber to be a white American male. Suspicion has naturally fallen on the various right-wing militia groups which have come into existence in recent years.

Centennial Olympic Park reopened on Tuesday with improved security precautions including random bag checks, double the number of police and the increased use of technology to monitor the area.

Compiled by Abeer Anwar

Too close for comfort

A group of Egyptian-American college students visiting Atlanta to cheer on the Egyptian handball team found themselves just a few metres away from being blown to bits. **Tarek Atia** talks to the lucky survivors of last week's Olympic blast

Luckily their musical tastes ran more towards rap. "These guys are terrible. Let's get out of here," Asmar' Omar, a 20-year-old engineering student from Virginia, said to his friends Noram Zaghloul, Mohamed El-Refa'i, Walid and Sarah Diab about a minute before the home-made "pipe" bomb that killed two and injured 110 went off last Saturday at 1:25 am in Atlanta.

Deciding to leave the Olympic-sponsored party at Atlanta's Centennial Park where Jack Mack and the Heart Attack belted out "cheesy cover songs" was more than just a way to save their ears — it may have saved their lives.

Four of the five friends, on summer break from their respective universities, had made the 12-hour drive from Washington DC to cheer on the Egyptian national handball team, and enjoy the parties on the sidelines of the last Olympics of the century.

But as they were walking out of the park, terror struck. There was a really loud noise, Omar told the *Weekly* in a telephone interview a few days after the blast.

"At first I thought it was fireworks, or the band, but when I turned around, the band was all on the ground, there was dust and smoke everywhere and dozens of people were on the ground, yelling and bleeding," he said.

Somewhere told them a bomb had gone off, but at first they didn't believe it. Then the police started shooting them away and the entire area was suddenly flooded with ambulances and policemen.

El-Refa'i, who lives in Atlanta, had a cellular phone and immediately called his wife Beth to reassure her they were all right. He thought maybe she had heard something about it on television. She hadn't, but by the time they all got to El-Refa'i's house an hour or so later Beth was in tears.

By then the details of the blast had emerged: a bomb in a bag had been placed in the five-story sound and video mixing tower near the stage. Someone had called the police 18 minutes before it went off, but there hadn't been enough time to evacuate the thousands of "mostly drunk college kids partying in the park."

The bomber had easy access to the park, which was security-free, unlike the actual Olympic events. US President Bill Clinton later pointed out that his daughter Chelsea had even visited the park, which was specially designed to be a place of "peace and harmony," according to Olympic organisers.

A few hours later, the five Egyptian-Americans realised just how lucky they were to have escaped the scene uninjured: while

they were only three metres or so away from the actual explosion, others up to 30 metres away were riddled by flying nails and scrap metal emitted by the home-made bomb.

The next day things became even more surreal. Choosing not to let their paranoia overtake them, the friends again ventured towards the Olympic village to watch an event. "In the stadium, the heavy security made you forget about the fear for a while," said Omar. But then afterwards, on their way to the garage where they had parked their car, the group found the street sealed off — there was another bomb threat at the garage itself.

"It became ridiculous," Omar said, "everywhere we went it was bomb, bomb, bomb." TV crews on the scene interviewed Omar, who in exasperation, said: "We just came down here to cheer on the handball team, and now we're just trying to get out of here to get some barbecue."

Over the next few days, however, his cynicism over the increasing chances of being a victim of a terrorist attack quickly turned to a nearly desperate ambivalence: "There's nothing I can do — it stinks but I just have to live with it. I think about it a lot but what can that do?"

If given the chance, would Omar go again? Actually, another group of Egyptian-

American college students, friends of his, are heading for Atlanta this weekend. Omar warned them not to go, but they would not budge. "It's a really stupid idea to go," Omar said.

Meanwhile, back home in DC, Omar and his friends are a bit more paranoid than usual. "It happened on the metro on my way to work Monday morning," he said. "I was just sitting there when I suddenly got the feeling that anyone could bomb this thing at any time — security is so lax everywhere."

Omar is just one of millions of Americans who are starting to realise that no one is immune to terrorism anywhere anymore.

If anything good came out of the bombing, it was that the finger was not immediately pointed at Arab or Muslim groups, as was the case after Oklahoma, and to a lesser degree after the recent TWA crash (although, in both cases, the FBI is keeping "an open mind" and refusing to rule out "a possible Middle East connection").

Also, the group of friends did get to watch the Egyptian handball team go for the gold. "They were excellent," Omar said. Several of their relatives in Egypt actually spotted them in the bleachers during the live telecast of the game, which was beamed via satellite all across the world.

Pointless Paris parley

The US wants trouble-makers to face swift G7 action, but its allies are more hesitant, writes **Gamal Nkrumah**

America must not let up in its efforts to catch terrorists. But trouble will inevitably brew if the world senses that America's efforts to fight terrorism are geared towards combating terrorists who strike high-profile targets like transatlantic airliners, to the exclusion of all other types of terrorism. America should heed what others think about America. Not everyone wishes America ill, but sadly many do in a funny sort of way. "America gets what it deserves" is a sentiment I've heard many times all over Cairo, in street cafes, in discos, in health clubs and at Friday prayers in mosques. University students and lecturers, youngsters and old-timers, rich and poor — they all say the same kind of stuff. They all feel uneasy and are ambiguous about "America's battle against terror."

Yesterday I stole away from work hoping to watch a cult movie called *12 Monkeys*. The film was supposed to have been screened at the American University in Cairo. For technical reasons, the movie was not shown and we were invited to watch instead *Escape from New York*, a science fiction movie whose director — some weird upstart — insisted in a preview interview that his film was actually a Western. I left in disgust before the showing of the movie; I'd seen enough from the trailers.

On my way out, I met a few acquaintances whom one would be hard pressed to call Islamist-oriented. While joining the general consternation and revulsion at the destruction in mid-air of the TWA 800 airliner off Long Island, New York, they exuded an air of defiance. But it was defiance of a curious kind, as if they were cutting their nose to spite their face. Numerous AUC students fly back and forwards to America on TWA in preference to Egypt Air. "Man, America

deserves what it gets," someone snarled. "Look at the attack in Atlanta. One person killed and yet a whole bloody nation in the faraway Caucasus is being mercilessly wiped out by the Russians and no one lifts a finger." Another chimed in: "Some in the West even breathed a secret sigh of relief that the Chechnya debacle did not get Russian President Boris Yeltsin into trouble during last month's presidential elections."

Foreign and interior ministers from the Group of Seven (G7) most industrialised nations — Britain, Canada, France, Germany, Japan, Italy and the United States — plus Russia met in Paris on Tuesday to brainstorm means and ways to combat international terrorism.

The Powerful Eight (P8) as they are now known held talks behind closed doors in a five-hour meeting. Atop the agenda lay sharing intelligence, trading notes on terrorism and studying security procedures. There were disagreements galore, though. The most unwieldy of the P8's problems was America's drive to impose trade sanctions on Libya and Iran.

French Interior Minister Jean-Louis Debré did not mince his words. "The US position," he shrugged in widely publicised television appearances, "is simplistic and overtaken by developments. It reduces terrorism to the work of certain states." Debré pointed out, however, that "the terrorists must know that wherever they are arrested, they will have to answer for their actions in their country of origin."

Debré's attitude was echoed by most of America's other European partners. German Foreign Minister Klaus Kinkel, too, dismissed America's embargo drive. "I do not think by closing dialogue, by isolating Iran, we will get better results in the international

fight against terrorism than those we already have," he said. What he did not say was that Germany has so far resisted pressure from the US to impose sanctions on Iran — not least because the latter still owes Germany \$8.5 billion in export credits. "In reality, I believe things are a bit more complex," Debré said tongue-in-cheek.

Prevention is better than punishment. But prevention is not necessarily synonymous with stepped-up security at airports, road blocks and check points. The prevention of the fury and frustrations that trigger off terrorist attacks is far better than the meting out of punishments to cow the terrorists.

Japan, for its part, announced that it was hosting an anti-terrorist meeting for the Asia-Pacific region. Japanese Foreign Minister Yukihiko Ikeda indicated that special efforts will be made to coax the newly industrialised nations of South East Asia to play a prominent role in decision-making at the gathering. Japan itself is reeling from the agonies of a mysterious outbreak of food poisoning, reckoned to be the work of shady pseudo-religious terrorist groups of the Aum Shinrikyo variety. Escherichia coli bacillus, better known as O-157, has claimed 500 victims so far in Tokyo. Over 6,000 cases of O-157 poisoning have cropped up in the southern Hokkaido prefecture of Sakai in southern Japan. Who will the Japanese blame?

In any case, a spokesman for the Japanese Foreign Ministry unequivocally stated in Paris that Japan will not support America's D'Amato-Kennedy bill, which would enforce an embargo against Libya and Iran as states sponsoring terror. "Such a measure may constitute an extra-territorial application of domestic law, which is unacceptable under relevant international law," he said.

"There is no doubt that the spirit [of the G7 meeting] and the decisions taken here [in Paris] will be very effective and will send a strong message not only to terrorists, but to states around the world that support terrorism and harbour terrorists," said US Undersecretary of State Peter Tarnoff. This statement is understandable, but in itself is absurd.

As is typical of most G7 meetings, there were arguments and counter-arguments concerning terrorism. More often than not, no argument is particularly convincing for the majority of the Third World. How should terrorism be checked? By penalising whole nations? At a press conference in Washington yesterday, President Hosni Mubarak put it succinctly: "If we can reach a comprehensive peace settlement [in the Middle East], I believe that we would be able to put an end to at least 95 per cent of terrorist acts in the world."

Mubarak acknowledged that terrorism was "a very serious problem", but he naturally declined to go along with America's plot to brandish Libya, Iran, Iraq and Sudan as pariah states that sponsor terrorism. "Why should the ordinary citizens suffer?" Mubarak asked. "We must find a way to punish the terrorists, but not to punish the rest of the people," he stressed. Egypt, for example, cannot stomach two of its immediate neighbours being embargoed and watch on helplessly as they slide into economic ruin and social disintegration. Mubarak, like many other Third World leaders and a sizeable number of America's European allies, is against "punishing innocent peoples". America will only create more enemies for itself if it persists in its policy of "punishing innocent people" who happen to live in "states sponsoring terror".

Al-Ahram Weekly

Dead or steadfast?

As President Mubarak's Washington visit draws to an end, all parties agree that negotiations must resume quickly; that no miraculous breakthroughs are expected soon — especially along the Syrian-Israeli track; and that the US will not exert significant pressure on Netanyahu prior to the November presidential elections. In short, it has been agreed that peace is the desired goal and instability, an unwelcome visitor to the Middle East political arena.

For peace to become more than a distant dream, concrete steps must be taken on the part of all involved, including the US. Mubarak made this abundantly clear in Washington. And with the time for talk long since elapsed, what is required now is action, not words. If Clinton is indeed sincere about giving peace a push in the right direction, then he must be willing to remain true to his convictions, even if they fly in the face of the Jewish-American lobby. During an election year this is not easy, but peace and justice rarely come cheap. They require the support of individuals who are able to set aside their personal interests, forsaking the gains to be accrued from folding under pressure, in favour of securing an outcome far more valuable than any to come out of pursuing a vested interest. This is the price of justice.

The US Middle East envoy last week stated, "Ultimately, it is not for the United States to decide [on peace]. It is the parties, themselves". Yet, this was not the view endorsed by Clinton as he sought to finalise the Dayton accords. He and Holbrooke all but locked the three parties in a room, not allowing them out until an agreement was struck. At the same time, he managed to hammer through legislation, despite the best efforts of a Republican-led Congress, allowing for the deployment of American troops in Bosnia.

What is needed now is more of this conviction. But the question remains — will Clinton be willing to put valuable votes on the line, leave himself open to attacks from Dole and other isolationist-endorsing Americans, in order to finish what he committed himself to in Madrid and at Rabin's funeral?

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Behind Bibi's double speak

In Washington or in Cairo, writes **Gamil Matar**, Netanyahu's message is the same: Israel has no intention of making peace

Netanyahu's visit to Cairo has ended. Lasting only a few hours, it was geared to draw the attention and hopes of millions within the Arab world and abroad. Egypt's guest and his host held a joint press conference, which came shortly in the wake of the announcement that an American civilian airliner had exploded over the Atlantic. I imagine that media officials in Israel and Egypt had expected that Netanyahu's visit to Cairo and the joint press conference to rake in high global ratings for at least a day.

Netanyahu, prompted by his aides and his American advisors, wanted to project a new image to the Arabs. He wanted to appear less provocative, less infuriating, even if that involved a measure of deceit and a good dose of falsehood. It was particularly important for him to stifle, or at least subdue, the campaign against him in the Egyptian press. His American advisors must have suggested that, while Netanyahu's arrogance may allow him to scoff at the media campaign, the US might well find it disturbing, at a time when Arab public opinion is growing increasingly incensed by American policy. There are many reasons for this. Foremost is that strident Israeli intransigence and Zionist arrogance still earn the US' continual reaffirmations of strategic support for Israel's security and welfare.

His visit has renewed hopes that negotiations will resume and "the peace process," as the rhetoric goes, will roll on. We are informed that Netanyahu is keen to build upon what has already been accomplished on the peace track. We hear that he is prepared to negotiate with Syria, that Israel has no regional aspirations in Lebanon, that the cordon which the government of Israel has imposed on the Palestinians for security purposes will be gradually lifted, that the prime minister of Israel will meet Yasser Arafat, that thousands of Palestinians in "Judea and Samaria" and in Gaza will be permitted to work inside Israel, and that the government of Israel is committed to peace, as founded upon the terms stated in Madrid, and to implementing its contractual obligations according to "the principle of reciprocity."

Did the visit accomplish its aims? I do not find it difficult to provide a substantive answer to that question. Nor will it "require time" — that phrase repeated, *ad nauseam*, by American and Arab officials since Netanyahu assumed power in Israel. As I said above, the primary purpose of the visit was to create a new, less offensive image of Netanyahu. To give him credit, he tried. He failed, however. His lies were few, but there was dissimulation in abundance, and numerous metaphorical turns of speech. When speaking about Israeli settlements, for example, there was none of that haughty and aggressive language used in Washington, where, in a particularly abrasive — and enthusiastically applauded — *bon mot*, he quipped that the Likud government had at least the same right to expand settlements as the Labour Party did. In Cairo, he simply stated: "You know our position." The wool slipped only a little when he said that the settlements were an issue to be discussed in the negotiations over a final settlement, and that the Arabs themselves had numerous positions on this subject. Nor did he announce that Jerusalem was the eternal capital of Israel, the statement that earned him one of many standing ovations in Congress. Here, in Cairo, he said that Jerusalem would remain united. As for the principles agreed upon by the negotiators, he recognised their existence, but asserted that they could be interpreted in different ways. In other words, instead of rejecting these principles outright, he couched his stand in terms that implied that his government reserved the right to differ from that of his predecessor.

Indeed, it was the same ruse he used when referring to the "land-for-peace" formula. At the press conference in Cairo, Netanyahu's answers were consistently incomplete. They would contain some inference, but always stop short of explicitly stating his policies and positions, which he had outlined only a few days earlier in the US. Hence, we heard only partial responses to questions about the peace process with Syria, the expansion of Jewish settlements, the problem of Hebron and the status of Jerusalem. Second, his answers were always watered down. He recognises the principles of the peace process, but every side has its own way of interpreting them. He accepts the principle of "land for peace" but this too can be open to many interpretations.

While Netanyahu tried to alleviate the hostility of Arab public opinion to his policies and those of the US, if only temporarily, it is particularly noteworthy that he did not offer a single concession or take a single step that might demonstrate his government's good will. He remained unyielding on three subjects that continue to pose serious complications to the peace process. First, he continued to give security considerations precedence over peace. Indeed, his stance on security is indicative of how fragile any peace can be if it is founded exclusively on agreements forever jeopardised by breaches of security and similar pretexts. Netanyahu's intransigence in this regard was cast into relief by President Mubarak's statements deriding the Israeli premier's obstinacy in placing primacy on security matters.

The second subject is the question of reciprocity. During his visit to Cairo, Netanyahu said repeatedly that if the Arab parties do not adhere to their commitments, they should not expect Israel to do so. The implication, of course, of this brand of doublespeak is that, if the Pal-

estinians receive foreign guests in Orient House in Jerusalem, they have no right to expect Israel to fulfil its obligations in Hebron, or other obligations stipulated in the Oslo Accords. This position is undoubtedly intended to convey a message to the Arab governments that have already concluded or will one day conclude treaties with Israel: it is sufficient that Israel views a step or a decision taken by an Arab government as a violation of its commitments for Israel to take drastic measures in "retaliation".

The third subject is the question of democracy. During his visit to Washington, Netanyahu conveyed a message that could not be misinterpreted. He told the Americans that it was vital to Israel to help spread and consolidate democracy in the Arab countries so that Israel could be assured that these countries would continue to abide by their commitments, as though democracy per se could ensure this. Yet, when asked about this subject in Cairo, he had the audacity to pretend that he had been speaking of democracy in Israel.

Nevertheless, I believe that we can expect to hear continued Arab-Israeli affirmations that the peace process will continue. Simultaneously, I anticipate numerous complications because of Netanyahu's obvious intention to renege on the Oslo Accords and to wriggle out of the agreements made in Madrid. If he could, he would declare these intentions openly and take unilateral action in that direction. New realities on the ground, however, make such decisions, while possible, too difficult and too costly.

As for the Arabs, they can no longer ease the constraints on the peace process, even if some of them want to do so. Public opinion in the Arab world — anger toward Netanyahu peaked during the Arab summit — is now aware of previously unknown aspects of the peace process. This anger may subside; then again, it may not.

The growing spectre of terrorism

The recent downing of the TWA plane and the bomb attack in Atlanta lent urgency to the fight against terrorism. **Mohamed Sid-Ahmed** discusses efforts to combat this modern scourge

So far, US officials have found nothing to suggest a link between last Friday's pipe bomb explosion in Atlanta's Centennial Park and the explosion which brought down the TWA jumbo over the Atlantic on 7 July. Although the air disaster, which killed 230 people, remains shrouded in mystery, investigators believe sabotage to be the most likely explanation. They acknowledged the difficulty of detecting plastic or liquid explosives that can be detonated on board an airborne plane by miniaturised timers, and admitted that a new breed of sophisticated terrorists can remain one step ahead of overburdened security personnel, especially at busy and crowded airports like New York's JFK from which the doomed TWA flight took off.

Although they have yet to announce that the two incidents are related, the fact the Atlanta explosion followed so closely on the heels of the unexplained explosion on board TWA Flight 800 can only confirm their theory that the Paris-bound flight was downed by a bomb. But as international terrorism goes high-tech, it is becoming increasingly difficult even to identify whether the cause of a disaster is an act of God or a man-made device, let alone apprehend and punish the perpetrators.

The fact is that terrorism has become an inescapable feature of modern life, and that it has reached unprecedented proportions in the last few years. The reasons are many, but perhaps the main underlying cause for the spread of the phenomenon is the alienation felt by wide sections of the world's population from what is optimistically termed a new "world" order, although it does not necessarily enjoy legitimacy in the eyes of the whole world. On the one hand, we are told that the United Nations is both the embodiment of the new world order and the instrument by

which it is implemented for the benefit of humankind as a whole; on the other, we see the new world order as operated by the US for the furtherance of its own interests. This dichotomy has led to a deep divide between a minority which sees the new world order as beneficial, and the overwhelming majority of humankind which feels marginalised and excluded from the scope of this order, and deprived of its benefits. The more frustrated elements among this majority can develop what can be described as a Samson syndrome, in which the logic is that if they are going to die anyway, they may as well bring the temple down on everybody's head. In other words, the frame of reference is death and despair instead of life and hope.

It can be argued that, with the end of the Cold War, the threat of death by nuclear conflagration is a thing of the past, or at least that it is no longer the main threat to life. This does not mean, however, that death does not continue to serve as the main frame of reference in the eyes of much of humanity, as borne out by the ongoing bloodbaths in Rwanda, Burundi and even Bosnia. In this context, terrorism can no longer be regarded as a random or transient phenomenon.

The new world order proceeds from the assumption that all conflicts can be resolved by peaceful means, at a time many signs indicate just the opposite. Despite exceptional efforts to reach a peaceful resolution of the Arab-Israeli conflict, Netanyahu's accession to power has taken the peace process back to square one. Another case in point is Ulster, where peace efforts have recently suffered a severe setback. In the mood of optimism which prevailed after the Madrid process was set in motion, after apartheid came to an end, Mandela was elected president of South Africa and the Ulster peace

talks began, many believed the new world order was finally taking shape. But more recent events belie this assumption, as structural loopholes in the very concept of a uniform world system encourage the emergence of anti-institutional forms of behaviour, including terrorism.

What is now being characterised as terrorism has not in all conditions been the object of universal condemnation. During World War II, armed resistance against the Nazi occupation of Europe was regarded as legitimate, even when it resulted in the death of innocent civilians. When the Nazi world order collapsed with Germany's defeat in the war, and the United Nations was established as the embodiment of a new world order imposed by the victorious Allies, its Charter upheld the legitimacy of armed struggle against occupation.

After World War II, it was only the Socialist camp which championed the cause of armed resistance, even when it involved civilian casualties, not against Fascism this time around, but against imperialism and colonialism. In defence of its interests, the West raised the slogan of democracy and human rights to denounce the more militant national liberation movements as terrorists. The two views collided most sharply in the aftermath of the '67 War in the Middle East. Following the collapse of the Socialist camp and the dismantling of the Socialist camp, it is the Western viewpoint which has come to prevail, so that armed struggle is today condemned out of hand and branded as terrorism, even when efforts to resolve a conflict by peaceful means have failed, and without regard to the explicit provisions of the UN Charter in this respect.

Actually, the whole question of what constitutes terrorism remains a grey area, with the leader of a known terror-

ist organisation like Irqun, Menachem Begin, hailed as a hero of peace, PLO leader Arafat regarded in Israel, even by Netanyahu, as the irreplaceable spokesman of the Palestinians and IRA leader Jerry Adams continuing to enjoy full freedom even after refusing to de-commission paramilitary weapons. Because terrorists retain the initiative, they enjoy an advantage over their opponents. Moreover, while the failure of a terrorist act will only hurt the organisation involved, the failure of the authorities to abort it can cause widespread damage. That is why terrorism cannot be uprooted if counter-terrorism focuses only on its manifestations without addressing its root causes.

Many intellectuals and political analysts have described the new world order as a new world disorder characterised by randomness and chaos. However, this view is not shared by the world's decision-makers. Some even try to make political capital out of terrorism. For example, Netanyahu uses the threat of "Arab terrorism" to extort even more support from the US and to deflect attention from his own responsibility for the current deadlock in the peace process by shifting the blame to the Arabs.

An interesting footnote on the question of terrorism is Nelson Mandela's recent state visit to London, where he was received with all the pomp and circumstance reserved by the British for their most honoured guests. I happened to be in London at the time, and was struck by the irony of it all. For it was not too long ago that the same British establishment which now hailed Mandela as a distinguished elder statesman vilified him as a bloodthirsty terrorist. It is thanks to the accession of this one-time "terrorist" to supreme power in South Africa that relations between Britain and South Africa have never been better.

A world of inspiration

By **Naguib Mahfouz**

Music has been an inspiration to me for as long as I care to remember. I knew the generation of musicians who first developed Arabic music along Turkish musical lines. I knew the generation of musicians who first developed Arabic music along Turkish musical lines. I knew the generation of musicians who first developed Arabic music along Turkish musical lines.

Abdu El-Hamouli, Abdel-Hai Helmi, El-Minialawi and Saleh Abdel-Hai. I knew, too, Sayed Darwish, who raised Arabic music to new heights that were perfected by Mohamed Abdel-Wahab and Umm Kalthoum.

I was also inspired by architecture, both ancient and Islamic, as representatives of two important strands of my national culture. In literature, I did not let myself be monopolised by our Arab heritage, but familiarised myself with foreign literature. I read English works in spite of my hatred for the British occupier. There were some who felt that English literature should be boycotted lest it should influence one to become pro-British, but I felt just the opposite. Literature — great, humane literature — always sides with liberty and equality.

There exist some very beautiful Pharaonic passages, in both prose and verse, which I have repeatedly used in many of my works, including *The Abolition of Man*, *The Egyptian*, *The Struggle of Thebes* and in *He who lives in Truth*. They are motifs that also reappear in a great many of my short stories.

Based on an interview by Mohamed Salaway.

The Press This Week

Al-Ahram: "In Washington President Mubarak will speak for Egypt and the Arabs. Peace is an Arab strategy, not an Egyptian problem... the Arabs know which direction they want to go and will not give up any of their rights. It is up to the other side to prove that it wants peace rather than hegemony over the region." (Ihsan Bakr, 28 July)

Al-Arab: "An independent economic policy has become more important than a handful of dollars from the US or a clean bill of health from the IMF. To say 'no' is better than succumbing to their demands: sell the public sector, open your ports to foreign goods, leave Egyptian production to slowly die, enter into an illegitimate marriage with Israel. Our independence is more important than their dollars and our political, economic and military security comes first." (Mahmoud El-Marghal, 29 July)

Rose El-Youssef: "The hostility being expressed by Egyptian public opinion towards the US is an expression of anger at the US' bias towards Israel... The official position is based on cold calculation, while the popular position is warm-blooded and not afraid to call a spade a spade." (Mahmoud El-Tohami, 29 July)

Al-Ahram: "The relationship between Cairo and Washington is a spurious one. The US does not want stability, progress or prosperity for Egypt, and neither are we willing to accede to the domination that those in the White House would like to impose upon us. American officials have wearied us with their talk of Egypt's importance, its status, its special relationship [with the US], but all their actions and positions reveal a deep hostility to Egypt and its over Mubarak's patriotic rejection of Israeli hegemony in the region." (Mustafa Bakri, 27 July)

Al-Ahram: "The facts are clear as day, but the problem with US strategy is that it does not make proper use of facts to achieve a just, balanced peace — the only way to guarantee lasting and stable protection of US interests. This is the change we demand of the US to safeguard its interests and those of the relevant parties." (Taha El-Magdoub, 28 July)

Al-Wafd: "The US administration looks on with an approving eye to everything Israel does. It is Israel's right to possess nuclear weapons but Egypt has no right to manufacture long-range missiles nor to protect itself against weapons of mass destruction." (Gamil Badawi, 29 July)

Al-Akhar: "A close examination of Egyptian-American relations reveals that they are strong and wholesome, as long as they steer clear of the Jewish lobby in the US which links Egyptian and Israeli stances to the peace process with stable Egyptian-American relations." (Galal Dwidar, 28 July)

Al-Mussawar: "Was Netanyahu sincere when he announced that he would continue the peace process and uphold previous agreements made by the Labour government? No one can really tell. It is deeds that prove intentions. But Netanyahu should know that Israel's international and regional policies cannot be based on vague and ambiguous statements unless this is a bid to gain time." (Mahmoud Mohamed Ahmed, 26 July)

Al-Ahram: "I was astonished to hear and read about the optimistic and welcoming reactions to the ostensible change in Netanyahu's views and positions. That change, which is perceived by some as basic is merely a bluff. He still holds firmly to the lasting beliefs of the extreme Israeli right, despite all his attempts to play a role for which he is not fit." (Salaheddin Hafez, 24 July)

Al-Ahram: "There is little doubt that the timing of President Hosni Mubarak's visit to Washington, some three months before the US [presidential] elections... will be made use of by the American side which will try to transform the visit into a campaign rally aimed at winning the American Jewish vote... Egyptian diplomacy, in its determination to hold fast to the positive climate created by the Cairo Arab Summit, should be fully aware that any retreat from the common positions adopted by the summit... will weaken its efforts to reestablish its Arab and regional stature, such efforts as have won credibility and popular support lately." (Amina El-Nagash, 31 July)

Compiled by **Hala Saqr**



I decided to portray Clinton as embodying the kind of solidity we associate with Greek statuary. Not that I intended the face to be static. He laughs until his cheeks are so rounded that they virtually obscure his nose. His eyes are like glass beads, protruding from a waxen visage. There is, though, a certain ambivalence in this image. Clinton, after all, faces a difficult election. His smile could easily turn into a baring of the teeth, as he sets himself to tackle not only the difficulties in the path of the peace process but also to counter the recent outburst of terrorist activities that may mar his election chances.

Close up

Salama A. Salama

A sporting chance

In Egypt the state claims to encourage sport while the people lose few opportunities to espouse their love of the same. Yet like everything else based on pretence such claims collapse when exposed to any real test.

This is exactly what happened to the Egyptian Olympic team at the Atlanta Games. The result was a resounding fiasco in every event in which we participated, embarrassing sportspeople and plunging everyone else into an "unjustified" gloom. The word unjustified I use advisedly, since no serious observer of the sports scene in Egypt could have expected a different outcome.

We all know that Egypt's last Olympic medal, a bronze, for judo, was won in 1984. It is also a fact that Egypt's best results were obtained at the 1948 Games, and prior to that in the 1928 Games. So what is new?

In Egypt we take pains to appear to allocate all the care in the world to sporting issues. We have a Supreme Council for Youth and Sport headed by a person of ministerial rank. There are innumerable federations covering every imaginable sport, from football to the less-known-do. These federations receive financial aid from the state budget which allows them to hold competitions and to participate in international events. And from what we read, the state is certainly not tight-fisted when it comes to financing athletes and sports administrators.

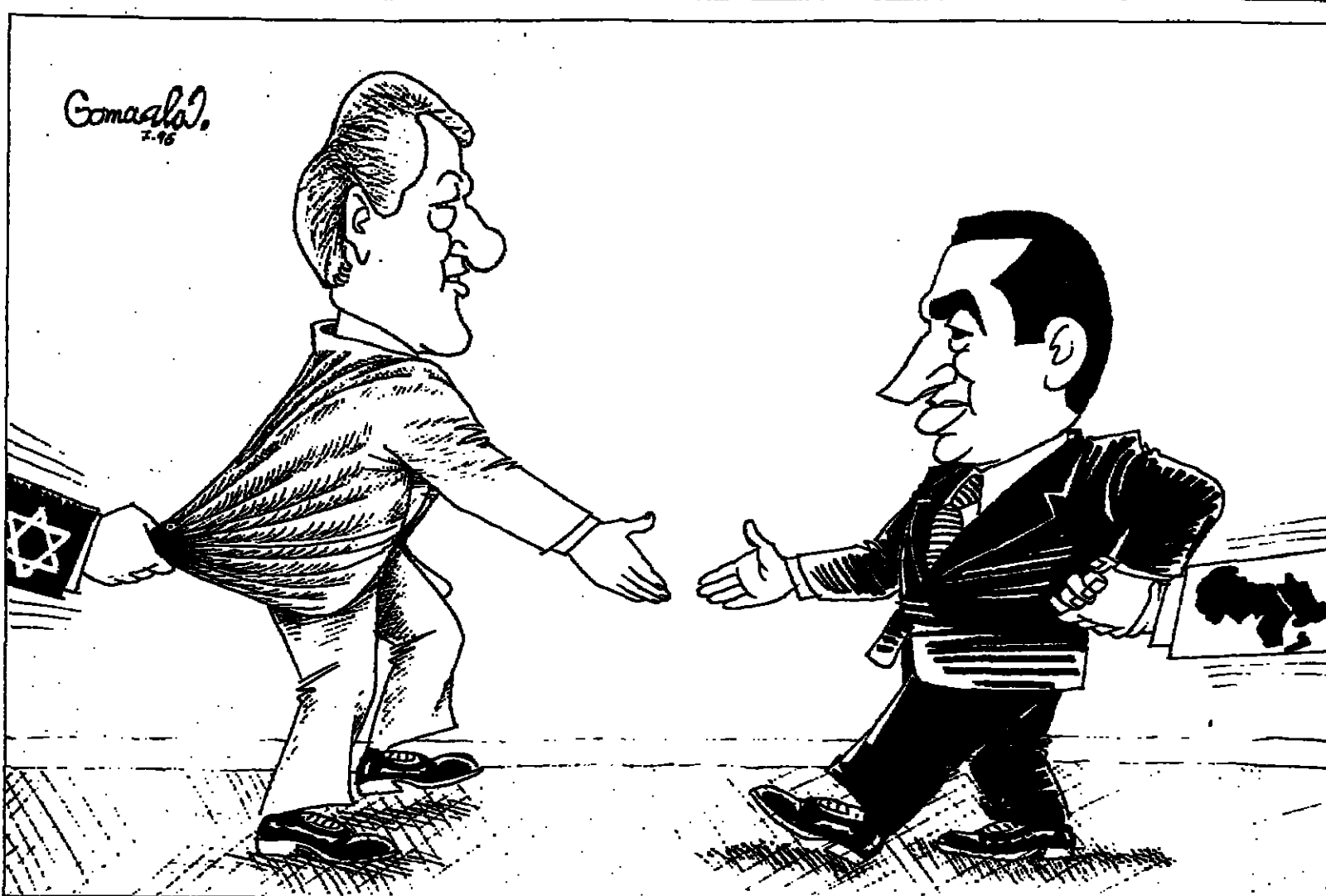
We have a flourishing sports press which reports on the various sporting events in its daily or weekly editions, and appears to resemble the sporting media in the rest of the world. We have small and large clubs, with hundreds of thousands of members.

Yet despite the money, the official backing, the popular support, we have failed to produce outstanding competitors. Why is this?

The reason why is like the secret everyone knows but no one dares to voice. Our international performance is the result of corruption, and its underlying, patronage, rife in the federations and in sporting clubs which are now controlled by gangs intent on profiting from sport.

The greatest attention, of course, is given to football, pumped up by the media into a spectacle encouraging a fanatic partisanship on the part of the public. Football heroes seem immune to any dent in their popularity, however badly they perform in international fixtures. Strangely, though, it should be noted that the sport in which Egypt has recently excelled internationally is a sport that receives little official funding but some private sponsorship, i.e. squash.

I would suggest that the dissolution of the Supreme Council for Youth and Sport is long overdue, as is the termination of all those federations that returned from the Olympic Games after a disastrous showing. The underlying reasons behind the successive fiascos, from 1948 to today must be carefully examined. For unless action is taken, action determined by an honest appraisal of our sporting failures, we shall remain at the mercy of officials who revel in the trappings of international meetings, but who kill rather than nurture talent and whose activities encourage defeat rather than victory in the sporting arena of the world.



A new struggle of principle

Only a new peace movement, inspired by the vision of a democratic and multi-cultural Palestine, can pull the Palestinian struggle out of the Oslo quagmire, argues **Edward Said**. Nelson Mandela's example provides the way forward

At roughly the same time, Nelson Mandela was visiting Great Britain, and Benjamin Netanyahu was on his first official trip to the United States. A greater contrast between two political leaders could not be imagined. Mandela came to London not only representing the new South Africa, but also the victory of political principle and moral reconciliation as no other leader on earth today does.

This is not a matter of idealising or sentimentalising the African National Congress, the liberation organisation that Mandela has headed for over thirty years, most of them spent in solitary confinement well away from the political spotlight. The ANC was certainly guilty of corruption, cronyism, political murder, and a whole host of other unseemly crimes. Yet what it always stood for, the single goal for which it was created, and of which Mandela himself embodied, never changed: the end of apartheid, and the institution of legal equality — one person, one vote — between blacks and whites. It is important to remember that by the 1980s the ANC had been defeated militarily by the South African government; most of its leaders, like Mandela and Walter Sisulu, were in jail, the rest either killed or in exile, like Oliver Tambo. Only the force of unyielding principle held on to form the position of moral strength, again represented by Mandela, was capable of delegitimising apartheid all over the world; this gradually compelled the white government to begin negotiations with the ANC not on its terms, but on Mandela's.

Nor was this all. Throughout the negotiations Mandela's policy was to attract to himself an important segment of the white business and intellectual community in his country, on the grounds that there would be reconciliation between the races, and not revenge, once apartheid was abolished. So great was the moral force of Mandela's promise to bring the black and white communities together after apartheid that his presence alone seemed to guarantee the future. It was felt that only Mandela could bring the country together, heal the wounds, and because his people had been the victims of white oppression, he was the man who could forgive — but not forget — the past. One of the things Mandela did after the South African elections was to set up a continuing committee whose role it was to keep before the public the evils of apartheid, this was done not in the spirit of re-education, but so that no one would forget the evils of a system that condemned millions of people to servitude and perpetual subordination. When he appeared in Great Britain therefore Mandela was recognised for his two great achievements, which he accomplished with dignity and amazing persistence. The only person he refused to meet — justly in my opinion — was Margaret Thatcher, a crude and unregenerately reactionary politician who had always refused to recognise the ANC except as a terrorist organisation. It is a measure of Mandela's stature that he was able to maintain his refusal in Thatcher's own country despite the fact that she is after all a former prime minister and a peer of the realm.

On the other hand, Netanyahu's visit was a triumph of bigotry and falsehood. He was given several standing ovations when he addressed a joint session of Congress, and to all intents and purposes his unyielding positions on Jerusalem, the settlements and his opposition to a Pal-

eststinian state were supported by President Clinton. Netanyahu's presence in the United States represented the triumph not of reconciliation and peace but — despite all the choruses since 1993 about the immense successes of the peace process — of power and injustice. Like all other Israeli leaders he denied the past and the reality of the Palestinians; he was a man insensitive to the heavy human toll caused by Israel to literally millions of Arabs. And once again, the Arab states were condemned to silence or to impotent hand-wringing from the sidelines. A few short years ago when Menachem Begin came to America bearing the Likud message, a number of Arab-American groups mounted demonstrations against him, and in fact were heard as they raised their voices in protest. For Netanyahu this time it is extremely likely that a few Arab-Americans tried to meet with him behind the scenes. In this way have we lost the moral strength of our position on Palestine which today represents nothing more than a few tattered symbols in the Bantustans of the self-rule areas. Palestine used to represent the ideal — very much like anti-apartheid — of justice and a struggle for equality; today it is scarcely remembered except as it is applied derisively to the corruption and injustices of Yasser Arafat's Palestine Authority.

I have just returned from a short trip to the West Bank and Jerusalem. What struck me — aside from the hopelessness expressed by most people — is that conversations between Palestinians are confined almost entirely to everyday worries and anxieties, most of which reflect the frustration of a people whose struggle has been demoted, passed by, reduced to a simple matter of minimum survival. All the newspapers run advertisements praising Mr Arafat as a great man, and they express gratitude for the things he has done. Yet no one has any illusions at all that his rule is anything but corrupt, that his police and prisons (there are 35 prisons in Gaza alone) are cruel, torture is rife, due process is suspended most of the time, and if you need to get anything done you have to have a connection with someone in the Authority. An index of this is that elected members of the Legislative Council express frustration at the fact that despite their attempts to pass reform bills, Arafat simply refuses to implement them: he wants to rule in his own way, unilaterally and without any significant civil interference. A lawyer friend told me that the most recent version of the Basic Law — or Constitution — being studied by the legal experts that Arafat appointed has produced a draft which is a good deal worse (in terms of democratic freedoms) than earlier drafts. For one, Arafat no longer promises to limit his time in office to two terms, for another "the president" has the power to pass laws; for still another, the powers of the Legislative Council are greatly reduced relative to the presidency; and finally, there are severely curtailed possibilities for citizens to have recourse to the law should their rights be diminished or threatened. The whole idea is that the Palestine envisioned by Arafat is one that leaves him entirely alone to rule at his pleasure, which in turn is dependent on what Israel allows him to get away with.

The tragedy is that Palestinians who view Netanyahu's ascendancy with trepidation and alarm have very little to fall back on. And in the world's eyes it is difficult to say

that Arafat and what he represents constitute a genuine alternative to the unacceptable vision of things offered by the Likud. Is Arafat's vision really any better? Here is an Authority, whose major figure he is, that has accepted the unacceptable, that has effectively given away most Palestinian rights just to be able to rule a series of tiny enclaves more or less as it wishes, collaborating with Israel in the suppression of real Palestinian self-determination.

While on the West Bank I paid a visit to Hebron, whose present sorry state is due to a combination of settler fanaticism and Palestinian negotiating ignorance (or villainy, the difference is unimportant). The Ibrahim Mosque today is totally surrounded by the Israeli army; Arafat agreed to this after the massacre. The whole Arab centre of town is now deserted, commercial life has been stifled, and wherever you look you see crazed Jewish fanatics, protected by the Israeli army — legally there because Arafat and his brilliant negotiators simply accepted their demands — making it impossible for the 200,000 Palestinian residents of Hebron who are forced to submit to curfews, searches, and prohibitions on movement since the massacre. Mr Natshe, the mayor of Hebron, told me that he had pleaded with Arafat and his men not to sign those clauses in the Taba agreement that gave Israel such unrestricted power over Hebron, but those requests were turned down. The same thing happened in Bethlehem, a town entirely within the Palestinian zone, where Israel has now opened a road for itself to gain independent access to Rachel's Tomb; this too was agreed to by Palestinian negotiators who had no idea at the time what they were giving up to Israel.

Because of this depressing background then, the vision of Palestinian struggle that had mobilised people all over the world, before the various changes instituted by Arafat and the PLO had begun, has now collapsed totally. Arafat's pronouncements are viewed by most Palestinians as empty talk, whereas of course the cruelty of his security apparatus is much more seriously believed. Unlike Mandela who never abandoned the principles and the goal of his struggle, Arafat and the people who follow him have trampled on principle, sold out on commitment, emptied language of any connection with political truth. This, alas, reflects the current situation of the Arab world as well. Which leader is looked up to, admired, held up as a role model? The number is extremely small. With half the Arab population now made up of extremely young (below 16) people, the vacuum in moral leadership is very grave. This, I believe, is why so many well-educated Arabs are turning back to the certainties of religion: what enrages them is not, as the Western Orientalists and Islamic "experts" allege, their fear of modernity, but rather the usurpation of political discourse and social space by a particularly mean-spirited, uninspiring brand of "realism".

This is especially true where Palestine is concerned. For the first time that I can remember, non-Palestinian Arabs in Egypt, Lebanon, Syria, Jordan and elsewhere have underlined the need for restoring political idealism and principle to their proper place in the struggle for Palestine. And also for the first time, Palestinians on the West Bank and Gaza no longer play a prominent role in this movement, so taken up have they become with com-

Soapbox

A leap of understanding

Interdependence is the name of the game, the most important aspect of international relations regardless of the size or strength of the countries involved. Egyptian-American relations are a case in point. Such relations are founded on cooperation and partnership despite occasional disagreements, which are usually contained by dialogue.

Relations between nations are a two-way street, which means that each party has the right to maintain a position compatible with its individual national interest and cultural profile. Thus Egyptian-American relations accommodate both Washington's bias towards Israel and Egypt's own regional commitments.

Any equitable relationship involves the mutual recognition of each party's right to be different. In the case of Egypt and the US such differences are bound to be pronounced since they involve two very different cultural traditions, one Arab-Islamic, the other Anglo-Saxon.

The gaps between such different cultural traditions necessitates that strenuous efforts be made to facilitate a greater understanding of the positions and motives of the other, and in so doing to counteract the influence of the Jewish lobby.

The Egyptian-American partnership confirms that regional cooperation is no longer a game that can have winners and losers. Everyone must be a winner, though to achieve this we have some way to go in reinforcing levels of mutual understanding.



This week's Soapbox speaker is professor of political science at Helwan University and president of Al-Qatar Consulting Centre.

El-Sayed Elewa

To The Editor

Sports muddle up

Sir - In "Egypt's quest for gold" (Al-Ahram Weekly 18-24 July 1996 — page 18) I read that Egypt refused to attend the Stockholm Olympics in protest of the joint attack on Suez by Britain, France and Israel.

The attack occurred at the end of October and the Olympics Games were in the summer. Question: How could Egypt know in the summer that in autumn someone would attack Port Said (not Suez)?

Answer: In 1956 the Olympic Games actually took place in Melbourne, Australia, in the Southern Hemisphere where summer starts on December 21.

In Stockholm the Olympics were hosted in 1912! Paolo Lombardini Zamalek

Adding insult to injury

Sir - It was a very morbid, macabre and ferocious scene. All wore civilian clothes. Most had their hands either bound with wire or chained. Spent cartridges lying nearby indicated they were shot deliberately at close range. This was the fate of dehumanised Bosnian Muslim civilians after the fall of Srebrenica enclave in the hands of the rebel Serbs a year ago.

Over 50,000 Bosnian women rallied in Tuzla, most of them were weeping at a very pathetic and sombre memorial scene. They wanted to know the fate of 8,000 of their missing men after the fall of the city.

UN war crimes investigators have discovered about 40 mass graves in Cernka near Srebrenica. They dug and excavated the victims. The evidence pointed to a civilian massacre committed by inhuman Serb firing squads. Of course this horrible discovery revealed a great deal of truth about the missing people. This was the worst atrocity committed in Europe since World War II. It is a stigma and a crying shame for a supposedly civilized continent which advocates human rights and patronises democracy and justice.

Despite the arrest warrants issued by the International War Crimes Tribunal in The Hague for Serb commander Ratko Mladic and political leader Radovan Karadzic, the international community is still incapable of arresting these butchers and bringing them to trial. These men are charged with organising savage war crimes including genocide, ethnic cleansing, and concentration camps where Bosnian men were tortured and their women raped.

What adds insult to injury is Karadzic's intention to run for Bosnian elections. Germany supported the suggestion that NATO's division in Bosnia should chase those criminals, but France and Great Britain refused and threatened to veto any bill which diverts from the mission of NATO's force in Bosnia.

Although President Jacques Chirac of France has urged NATO to carry out air strikes against Serb aggressors after the fall of the "safe area" of Srebrenica, this can't justify nor absolve the French and British stance opposing NATO forces arresting war criminals.

I think that the UN, as the conscience of the world, and the international community, with

sound of reason and justice, must adopt an active mechanism and a new strategy to arrest war criminals in their homelands or at least impose very tight sanctions on Serbs to force them to hand over war criminals.

Ahmed Mohamed Sabry
Cairo University

Analysis needed

Sir - I read with great interest Galal Amin's article "Do the Arabs have a future?" (Al-Ahram Weekly 25-31 July). Amin's attempt to diagnose the ills of the Arab world is indeed commendable, but the cure he suggested seems unrealistic.

I must admit that the writer's explanation for the rot in the Arab world is quite new to me and I do believe that this matter requires more research and deeper analysis. If we accept the writer's assertion that "Arab revival is conditional upon psychological rehabilitation rather than economic or political reform", I wonder how this can be achieved and how long it might take.

It is true that a revision of our education system is a necessity, but the fact that more than half the population is illiterate makes the goal of creating any sort of awareness almost impossible to realise. The absence of long term planning in any endeavour to achieve "Arab revival" has always been a serious defect in Arab thinking.

Essam Hanna Wahba
Salam Language School
Assuit

Precious water

Sir - This is a letter I have been meaning to write for a long time now. Every now and then there is an article or a programme or even a TV advertisement about water and its importance and the need to save every drop. Indeed just as the word "petro-dollars" has been coined, there are already some circles talking about "aqua-dollars".

Like scientists have anticipated a food shortage will occur, a shortage of drinking water is not at all unimaginable. Although immense efforts are done to increase awareness of how to save water, these campaigns are mainly addressing the civic-minded, intelligent and reasonable person. Well, what about the rest? To give an example, all you need to do is look around in my neighbourhood. Every morning, all the janitors come out and wash the cars parked in the street. I do not believe that a car needs to be washed daily, but that is not the worst. The next thing they do is that they wet the whole street, which then becomes a small lake. Can you imagine the amount of drinking water wasted this way? The same applies to gardeners who overwater the gardens creating perfect breeding places for mosquitoes. I have a suggestion to remedy this.

The government should charge a price for every unit of water used by a given household. Right now, this is done pretty arbitrarily. But if every household had a proper water-meter or clock, this would make people much more aware of how much water they use.

Christa Ashour
Dokki

Going for gold

By Salah Montasser

Intense speculation continues as to the cause of the explosion of TWA flight 800 — a bomb in the cargo hold and a surface-to-air missile are just two of the suggestions — but there is no debate as to the motive for the explosion in Atlanta's Centennial Park. One dead, over 100 injured: these were the innocent bystanders who trusted repeated affirmations of tight security measures, and came to mingle with the largest ever crowd of Olympic spectators ever.

The athletes were competing in 29 sports for gold, silver and bronze, or to break previous world records. But one event was not on the official agenda. Inadvertently, the US added one more gold to its trophy case — not in gymnastics or track and field, but in terrorism. Investigations have come to focus on a main suspect: an extremist "local militia" in Georgia, banned last April.

Militias took up the gauntlet flung down by the American media, which vaunted these games as the best guarded ever. In fact, they took it up repeatedly, apparently thumbing their Arayan noses at security forces: three other explosive devices were discovered. If they had detonated, the number of casualties would have been so high that the Games, no doubt, would have been cancelled.

The bombs in Centennial Park prove that no country, no matter how powerful, is immune to the threat from within. Extremists of every stripe seek to destabilise their own societies and impose their own agendas. While the US is a democratic society, this has not prevented the most brutal brand of terrorism from flourishing, a terrorism which targets blameless revellers, participating athletes and law-enforcement officers.

Is there any link between the bomb in the park and the explosion of flight 800? The target, and the means adopted, seem identical. If the same group is proven responsible for both tragedies, the US could rack up two golds in the same event — surely a record-breaking achievement.

The height of summer

A case of hang or be damned? Not quite, writes **Nigel Ryan**, who discovers some unlikely neighbours



Fathi Hassan, for whom less may well be more

Summer is something of a dry season. Knock-knock, who's there? More often than not, the answer is: Or else everyone. It is that time of the year.

It is either everyone or no one as far as art galleries are concerned. Summer is, after all, the time of summer shows, when private galleries in particular tend to allocate space to their stable, to those artists who have been exhibited throughout the year, or even in previous years. The group show reigns supreme.

I do not mind the summer. These servings of leftovers, which even though some of the pictures are new in essence what they are, serve a useful function. Artist's whose works are seldom if ever hung together are hung together, allowing the visitor to make comparisons that would otherwise be impossible.

The current exhibition at the Mashrabiya Gallery is a case in point. It includes — I apologise for the list but in this kind of show lists are unavoidable — Wahib Nasser, Mohamed Abia, Adel El-Siwi, Fathi Hassan, Mohamed Ghannem, Yasser Grab, Mahmoud El-Aswani, Magdi Kenawi, Assem Sharaf, Louis Tewfik, Gamal Abdel-Nasser, Awad El-Shinni, Georges Bahgory, Essam Maarouf, Wajeh Wahba, Omar El-Fayoumi and Ibrahim El-Haddad. Not a bad crop by any means.

Some of these artists' one man shows have already been reviewed on these pages. Fortunately, though, group shows such as this allow the newspaper critic a chance to revise opinions. This I would be keen to do in the instance of Fathi Hassan. The four or five paintings

now displayed, all of which were included in the artist's recent exhibition Saint Africa, appear slightly more nuanced when displayed away from the larger canvases included in the first exhibition, and when stripped of the hollow rhetoric of a fashionable search for identity. Here these small canvases stand alone, vivid, fauve colours less concerned, now, with striking the right personal-political note than with decorative formulations that are decidedly incorrect.

Far less contrived formulations are exhibited in other works, most notably in the simple depictions of fabulous creatures concocted from felt-tip pen and crayon by Louis Tewfik. Figures float while push-me-pull-you push and pull in opposite directions like petulant Siamese twins.

A more contrived disingenuousness is apparent in the work of Gamal Abdel-Nasser, a sculptor whose most whimsical pieces often take the form of a nudged-nudge, wink-wink joke amongst the boys. In this exhibition he shows a single piece comprising two figures, the torsos of which are constructed from plastic broom heads in pink and blue. There is a man and there is a woman. How do we sex these broom heads? Well, it is easy, for Mrs Broom has two pink ping-pong ball breasts attached to her torso. And what of the man? Well, Mr Broom has no breasts.

Compared with such flippancy other artists' attempts at the portentous sometimes strike a wrong note. Awad El-Shinni's graphic interiors, flattened like architectural drawings and completed with reference to an endless grid, as if

initially drawn on graph paper before being printed, seem remarkably unfocused. The atmospheres after which they strain are rarely captured, if at all.

Omar El-Fayoumi is equally neat, and in at least one of the paintings included in this show, as obsessive as El-Shinni when it comes to geometric precision. El-Fayoumi, though, allows some habitation of his pictorial space. In the foreground a curiously reptilian figure sits at a table, a coffee loving road, while an ambiguous floating figure, an archangel perhaps, hovers somewhat unconvincingly above the minaret of a mosque.

Strolling around the Mashrabiya, one might be forgiven for thinking that everything and anything is in a perpetual state of suspension. Essam Maarouf has hearts floating across his canvases. Shawki Ezzat opts for something more oracular. Lips, lots of lips, punctuate his picture surface as if some femme fatal with a penchant for green lipstick had spent an afternoon kissing the canvases.

Mohamed Abia shows four oleaginous portraits, variations on the same schematised theme, sharp diagonal noses, the same head and shoulders, looking at the spectator with the same blank stare. Adel El-Siwi includes a painting of a face in a three-panel structure together with some fussily articulated still lifes, complex pictorial spaces containing not just *objet typé* but also figures, always, it seems, on the point of dissolution.

Wahib Nasser's anthropomorphic pictograms, strange forest scenes, share a scratching-after significance with

both Magdi Kenawi and Ibrahim El-Haddad. There is something antediluvian, primordial, archeological about these three artists' works. Most obvious in the work of Kenawi, who appears at times to be deciphering ancient graffiti, the appeal of things ancient is more subliminal in El-Haddad and Nasser's work.

The world of the ethnographer is also evoked in the sculptures of Mahmoud El-Aswani, whose clay and wooden figures appear as fetishistic souvenirs. It is as if those charmless clay figurines of 'Egyptian types', which fill or seem to fill almost every bazaar, had been stripped of their stereotyping and turned into something at once less familiar and far more disturbing.

Equally disconcerting are the figures in the work of Yasser Grab. A strange, black figure is silhouetted on the side of the road amid a yellow landscape. Other figures are entwined in a spider's web, ambiguous, part human forms with unpleasant tails and protrusions.

Somebody lurks in the background of the single canvas by Wajeh Wahba, and it is not someone you would want to invite to dinner. And though they lack the extra limbs Grab is want to give his figures — indeed several of them lack limbs at all — the truncated forms in Assem Sharaf's large painting, one of the largest included in the show, are no less disturbing. This is a hellish circle, and its inhabitants, justifiably, look far from happy.

Summer shows are interesting because you never quite know what is round the corner. The Mashrabiya show does not disappoint.

Cinema

Hooray for today

Mohamed Shebli on apes and dinosaurs, on screen and among critics

Some of cinema's die-hard purists find it extremely hard to come to terms with the technological developments and innovations continuously being introduced in the movies. Now more than ever there is a startling attack against the wonders and magic of computer graphics, and the limitless potential they offer the filmmaker.

I suppose it has always been the case because flipping through the history books, one can sense the terrific war that raged between advocates of the silent flicks and those of the talkies; between those who preferred honky-tonk piano accompaniment and those who championed recorded sound and score. There were wars waged by black and white purists who were livid when they saw the first colour films. The same happened when cinema-scope was first introduced. All wide angle and fish-eye lenses were belittled in favour of the normal anamorphic.

If we were to ignore the fuss and ridicule made about gimmicks like surround sound, cinema-scope or 3D vision, we can never overlook the full-fledged war that followed attempts to "colourise" pictures. When the first prototypes of shorts featuring Laurel and Hardy were screened, screams of fire could be heard reverberating. Sit-ins and lie-ins and strikes were held featuring such notables as Woody Allen, who incidentally used some modern technology himself in his film *Zelig* where the process of "morphing" by computer was used throughout the entire picture to depict the chameleon-like character of the film. Here in Egypt, the same purists were organising lynch-mobs to riot, once and for all, those who dared add tints of colour to oldies by Umm Kalthoum or Asmah. And yet the films are on sale everywhere, come what may.

The theory of the so-called "traitors", is that the "original"



Real cars, ersatz elephants

black and white will always remain on the market for everyone to cherish and enjoy, so why not improve the sound or picture? Why insist on a crackling and static ridden soundtrack that sounds like it was dragged from between the claws of cats locked in mortal combat.

With the transfer of oldies to video, digitised for satellite, compact discs, and now to laser vision and CDE for what promises to be the ultimate audio-visual experience, the computer revolution is here and in full swing, and to the probable chagrin of the purists there is nothing anyone can do about it.

And cinema is not the only battlefield — certainly not here in the Middle East. At least in Europe, if someone records a computerised synthesizer version of Beethoven's Ninth, he is not accused of blasphemy. And take a popular song like The Beatles' *Yesterday*. Somebody

listed more than 2,500 different versions, ranging from the Royal Philharmonic to a sitar rendition recorded in Bombay. Some of these versions are fine, some are atrocious. But none of these variations affects the status of the original song. It will always be there for generations to enjoy. No major cultural *faux pas* was committed.

To return to our subject, the same can, and must, be said about films. *Potomkin* was a great film. And Eisenstein was a great director. But had young and very innovative Russian filmmakers not broken the rules, we would still be getting stark black and white flicks now, wouldn't we?

The reason I go into all this is because some film critics have taken very negative attitudes towards two splendid films on the market. The first, *Jumanji*, has already grossed massive worldwide box office receipts. The second, *Toy Story*, is on its way

to becoming one of the biggest grossing films of all time.

Their argument is that the "human element" is lacking, especially in *Toy Story* which is totally computerised. One critic considered that the film ranks among the most boring pictures he had ever seen. Another claimed that the film did not even rise to the standards or pre-requisites to be considered for entry, even if out of competition, in one of our local festivals. To these and several other critics, *Jumanji* does not fare better.

But some of the harping is quite ludicrous. "You can tell that the lion is not real, neither are the monkeys or the bats, but computerised dolls." But that is the whole point of the film and, for that matter, of the genre. No one pretends that the *Tyrannosaurus Rex* in *Jurassic Park* is real. No one imagined that E.T. was in fact an actual extra-terrestrial alien cast for

the film. Or that his forefinger actually lit up. It is a little like arguing whether the fruit in a painting tastes sweet or sour. Who cares? Does anyone imagine that today's computer nurtured kids doubt for a second that the herds of elephants, rhinos and zebras that burst through the fireplace and stampede through someone's living room and onto the streets are in fact superimposed graphics enhanced by state-of-the-art technology?

What the kids, and quite a number of the grown-ups want, are the thrills. *Jumanji* is full of thrills. It has you on the edge of your seat throughout the duration of the picture, and thanks to the graphics and special effects, we are spared the usual bad acting that accompanies such films. Take, for example, the two versions of *King Kong*. The mechanical ape was the only interesting element in the film, the acting was a shambles. But in *Kong*, and the following Japanese monster movies like *Rodan* and *Mothra*, the makers of the films actually demanded that we believe the monsters were real. That was stretching the imagination too far, and ever since they were made, these films have been considered kitsch. But in the new wave of 11x films, most notably in *Jumanji*, the director seems to relish the fact that the film appeals to space-age whiz kids, and therefore indulges in his effects.

After the film is over, you are left with an exhilarating sense of relief — due to the thrills, the laughter, or the sheer preposterousness of the whole affair. Admittedly the film does not allude to the problems of the new world order, the ramifications of the fall of the Soviet Union, or the situation in Bosnia.

So much the better. What remains is pure fun and entertainment. Hooray.

Listings

EXHIBITIONS

Ibrahim Abdel-Chani
Atelier du Centre El-Rashid, Sidia Hall, 23 Ennassr St. Downtown. Tel 574 6730. Daily exc Fri. 10am-1pm, 6pm-10pm.

Alaa El-Sherif (Sculptures) & Ali El-Sabahi (Sculptures)
Atelier du Centre El-Rashid, Sidia Hall, 23 Ennassr St. Downtown. Tel 574 6730. Daily exc Fri. 10am-1pm, 6pm-10pm.

Group Show
Mashrabiya Gallery, 8 Champollion St. Downtown. Tel 578 4494. Daily exc Fri. 10am-5pm. Show featuring the works of artists exhibiting at the gallery during the last six years.

Mohamed Shaker (Paintings) & Tarek Zahady (Sculptures)
Ezra Gallery, 3 El-Nasser St. Zamalek. Tel 340 6293. Daily exc Sun. 10.30am-2pm & 3pm-8pm. Until 27 July.

Group Show (Paintings & Sculptures)
Espace Gallery, 1 El-Sherif St. Downtown. Tel 393 1099. Daily exc Fri & Sat. 9am-1pm. Until 3 August.

Hellenic Library
Fouad El-Helwan, 6 Aisha El-Taymouria St. Garden City. Tel 355 1871. Daily exc Sat & Sun. 10am-2pm. A display of books about Greece in Greek, English, French and Arabic.

The Museum of Mr and Mrs Mohamed Mahmoud Khalil
1 Kafour El-Akhdid St. Dokki. Tel 336 2376. Daily exc Mon, 10am-6pm.

Egypt's largest collection of nineteenth century European art, amassed by the late Mahmoud Khalil, including works by Courbet, Van Gogh, Gauguin, Monet and Rodin.

Egyptian Museum
Tahrir Sq. Downtown. Tel 575 4319. Daily exc Fri. 8am-5pm; Fri 9am-11.15am & 1pm-5pm.

Outstanding collection of Pharaonic and Ptolemaic treasures and the controversial mummies' room.

Coptic Museum
Mar Girgis, Old Cairo. Tel 362 8766. Daily exc Fri. 9am-4pm; Fri 9am-11.15am & 1pm-5pm.

Founded in 1910, the museum houses the largest collection of Coptic art and artefacts in the world.

Islamic Museum
Port Said St. Ahmed Maher St. Bab El-Khalq. Tel 390 9930/390 1520. Daily exc Fri. 9am-4pm; Fri 9am-11.15am & 1pm-5pm.

A vast collection of Islamic arts and crafts including mashrabiya, lustreware, ceramics, textiles, woodwork and coins, drawn from Egypt's Fatimid, Ayyubid and Mamluk periods and other countries in the Islamic world.

Museum of Modern Egyptian Art
Opera House Grounds, Giza. Tel 340 6861. Daily exc Mon, 10am-1pm & 3pm-5pm.

A permanent display of paintings and sculpture charting the modern art movement in Egypt from its earliest pioneers to latest practitioners.

Mohamed Nagui Museum
Chateau Pyramides, 9 Mahmoud El-Gundi St. Giza. A museum devoted to the paintings and sculpture of the late Nagui (1889-1956).

Mohamed Mukhtar
Tahrir St. Giza. Daily exc Sun and Mon. 9am-1.30pm.

A permanent collection of works by the sculptor Mahmoud Mukhtar (d. 1934), whose granite monument to Saad Zaghloul stands near Qasr El-Nil Bridge.

FILMS

Japanese Cultural Centre, 106 Qasr El-Ain St. Garden City.

The Longest Tunnel, 1 August 6pm. Directed by Shiro Moritani the film, set near Hokkaido, depicts the love, suffering and social relations of workers as they construct a tunnel under the Tsuruga Channel in the aftermath of a ferry disaster in 1954 Japan.

Commercial cinemas change their programmes every Monday. The information provided is valid through to Sunday after which it is wise to check with the cinemas.

Mit Felt
Rivoli 1, 26 July St. Downtown. Tel 375 1053. Daily 1pm, 3.30pm, 6.30pm, 8pm & 10pm.

Starring Hesham Saleh Selim and Sherihan as a husband and wife who, upon being given the opportunity of choosing a new father, choose the same rich man and end up as siblings.

Alfari El-Asfari (Asphalt Demons)
Rivoli 1, 26 July St. Downtown. Tel 375 1053. Daily 1pm, 3.30pm, 6.30pm & 9.30pm.

Ossama Fawzi's debut film depicts the lives of a number of microbus drivers, performed by Mahmoud Hossain, Abdalla Mahmoud and Hassan Hosni.

Ya Doola... Ya Gharami (Life... My Passion)
Tiba 1, Nasser City. Tel 262 9407. Daily 10.30am, 3.30pm, 6.30pm & 9.30pm.

to becoming one of the biggest grossing films of all time.

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So much the better. What remains is pure fun and entertainment. Hooray.

Magdi Ahmed Ali's debut film explores the intimate lives of three women played by Leila Eloui, Elham Shalabi and Hala Sedqi.

El-Salahif (The Turtles)
Lila, 33 Ennassr St. Downtown. Tel 934 284. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm.

With Samir Ghahem.

Lighty (Assassination)
Sphinx, Sphinx Sq. Mohandessin. Tel 346 4017. Daily 6pm, 8pm, 10pm. 17 El-40 St. Ennassr St. Downtown. Tel 924 127. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm. Radio, 24 Talaat Harb St. Downtown. Tel 375 6562. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm. Romy Sq. Heliopolis. Tel 238 0344. Daily 10am, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm. Faten Hammam, Manshi El-Rady. Tel 364 9707. Daily 10am, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm.

Fair Game
Karl 11, 15 Ennassr St. Downtown. Tel 924 830. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm. El-Salam, 65 Abdel-Hamid Badawi St. Heliopolis. Tel 293 1072. Daily 3.30pm, 6.30pm & 9.30pm and Thurs midnight show.

Normandy, 31 El-Ahram St. Tel 250 0254. Thurs midnight show.

She is a woman with a secret who someone wants to silence and he is the cop who's going to help her — whether she likes it or not. With Cyn-di Crawford and William Baldwin.

Under Siege 2
Normandy, outdoor theatre, 31 El-Ahram St. Tel 250 0254. Daily at 7.30 pm.

Steven Seagal is back as the former navy seal turned ship's cook turned hero in this overcooked action film.

Jumanji
Cairo Sheraton, El-Casas St. Giza. Tel 360 6081. Daily 10.30am, 1.30pm, 3.30pm, 6.30pm, 9.30pm & midnight.

El-Horrey, El-Horrey St. Giza. Tel 385 8153. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm.

Tiba 1, Nasser City. Tel 262 9407. Daily 10.30am, 3.30pm, 6.30pm & 9.30pm.

A game played with very real consequences. With Robin Williams.

Sabrina
Ramses Hilton II, Corniche El-Nil St. Tel 574 7436. Daily 10.30am, 1.30pm, 3.30pm, 6.30pm & 9.30pm.

El-Horrey, El-Horrey St. Giza. Tel 385 8153. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm.

Director Sidney Pollack's remake of My Fair Lady. With Harrison Ford and Julia Ormond.

The Quest
Cinema 11, 12 Ennassr St. Downtown. Tel 779 537. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm.

First Knight
Ramses Hilton II, Corniche El-Nil St. Tel 574 7436. Thurs midnight show.

Medieval era story starring Sean Connery and Richard Gere.

Heat
Karl 11, 15 Ennassr St. Downtown. Tel 924 830. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm. MGM, Manshi El-Rady, Heliopolis. Tel 238 0344. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm.

With Oscar winners Robert de Niro and Al Pacino.

Waiting To Exhale
Tahrir 112 Tahrir St. Dokki. Tel 335 5726. Daily 3pm, 6pm & 9pm. Normandy, 31 El-Ahram St. Heliopolis. Tel 238 0344. Daily 12.30pm, 3.30pm, 6.30pm & 9.30pm.

The story of four women, their friendship and their quest for love. With Whitney Houston and Angela Bassett.

Species
Metro, 35 Talaat Harb St. Downtown. Tel 393 3897. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm.

Dr Jekyll & Ms Hyde
Cinema 11, 12 Ennassr St. Downtown. Tel 779 537. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm.

Man Without A Face
El-Horrey, El-Horrey St. Giza. Tel 385 8153. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm.

Sensitive story about the growing friendship between a young boy and a social outcast in small town America. Their relationship struggles to survive under mounting pressure from those with suspicious against the man whose only crime appears to be the misfortune of facial disfigurement.

Starring Mel Gibson in his directorial debut.

Toy Story
Ramses Hilton II, Corniche El-Nil St. Tel 574 7436. Daily 10.30am, 1.30pm, 3.30pm, 6.30pm, 9.30pm & midnight. El-Horrey, El-Horrey St. Giza. Tel 385 8153. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm.

El-Sabah (The Turtles)
Lila, 33 Ennassr St. Downtown. Tel 934 284. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm.

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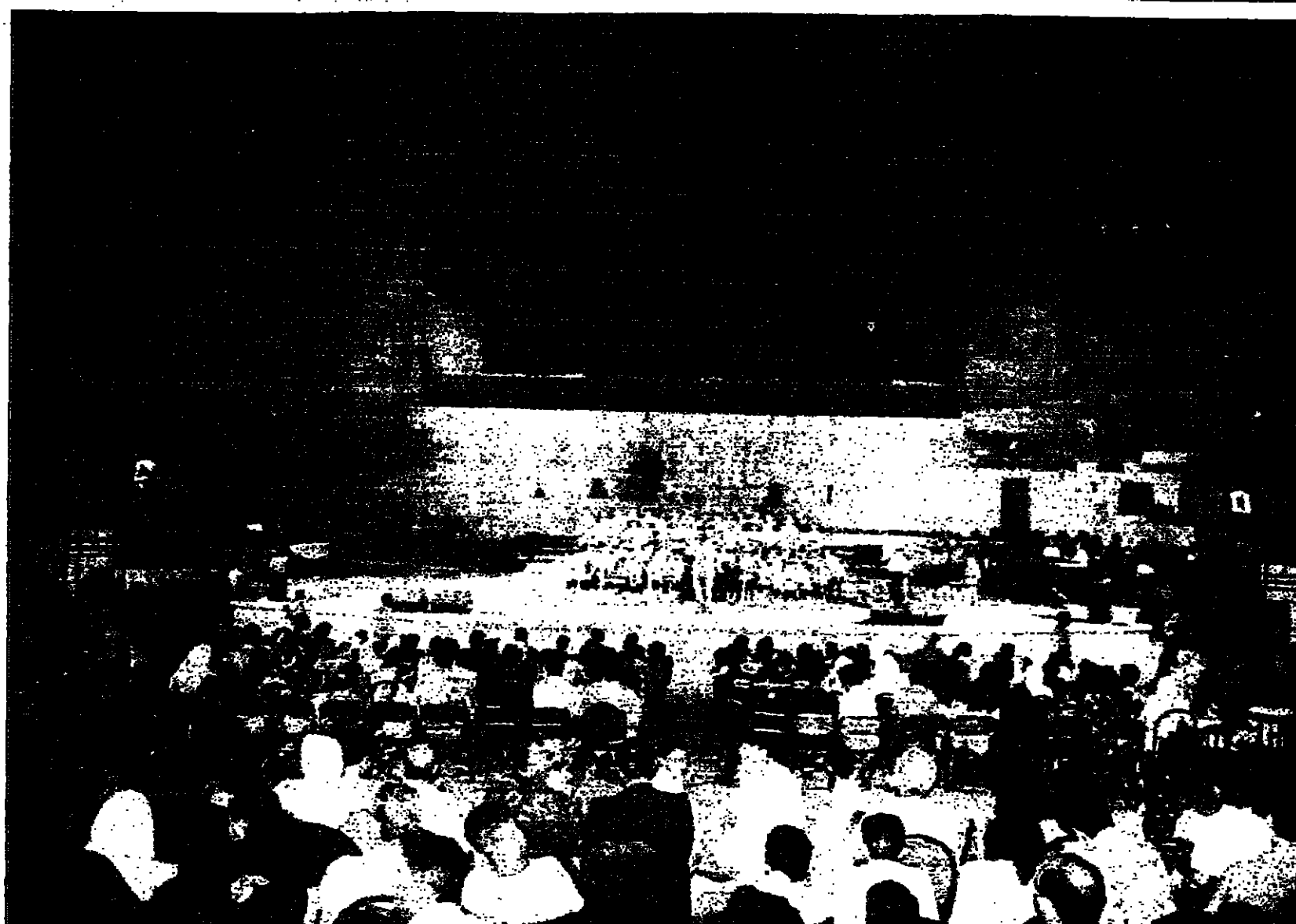
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Serag Ezzat now manages five major theatrical spaces in Cairo. David Blake examines the role of the man behind the front of house



Serag Ezzat, left, manages the most important stages in Cairo including, above, the open air theatre at the Citadel and below, the main stage at Cairo Opera House

The man himself

Go into the Cairo Opera House by any entrance, make for the big festal tapestries of mythic beasts and flowers, stop a moment and then, to the right of you is a small office. If the Opera House is functioning, then the door will always be open. Look in. It is bare but neat, a few sticks of furniture backed by a desk.

The desk is the thing. On it, facing you, is a metal plaque which says "Serag Ezzat — General Manager of the Cairo Opera House". Strange antediluvian wording, but strictly to the point. Sitting — but mostly standing — will be the man himself: Mr. Serag as he is known to most visitors.

The Serag manner is buoyant, brisk and fearless. He looks, in spite of the smile, someone with whom it is best not to tamper. He is direct, without any of the swoopy theatre manner prevailing in most opera houses. The voice is strong, razor-sharp, issuing from a medium-sized body of bluish colouring. He is a natty dresser, informal, never done up or official. The nose is never around the ceiling. He exudes confidence, but never the confidence trick — not a manipulator or a predator, these being side-issues to his purpose which is the job, the work of being responsible for a very beautiful piece of public property: the Cairo Opera House.

Charm, yes, but there are limits. His manner turns choppy, then stormy, then an explosion — and this all happens quite frequently. The eyes are the most riveting thing about him. He can look mild behind the glasses but there they are, the eyes, brightly shining. The mood will go rugged, the eyes bulge and glare and fire out abrasive comments and commands. He has many friends and some enemies. He arouses controversy — as does every person who belongs in an opera house, a place where it is no good sitting around quietly in a corner if you wish to achieve anything. Serag has two human eyes, of course, but he has a third eye and it is this small room in which we are from which that third eye focuses. It sees you arrive and sees you leave — going off the premises. Everyone must pass across the field of its vision. It is unblinking and unobvious, the secret third eye, the eye of the Cyclops. And Serag has the energy to warrant this comparison. So much for the Big Hall, as the Opera House number one is called. There is also the Opera House number two, the Small Hall. And, finally, the Opera House number three, the Open Air Theatre.

Serag Ezzat has recently been elevated, entrusted by the authorities to the job of being the sole manager of the three halls. All three come under the jurisdiction of the Cyclopean third eye, which, of course, is part of the Ezzat unique physical equipment. He is the man with the lamp and also the danger siren if anything goes

wrong. This power is under his hand at all times when he is in the theatre. This is more than enough, but there is more to come. Recently, as well as the three halls of the Opera House, Ezzat was entrusted with the care of the new El-Gomhouria Theatre, and further afield, the management of the theatre on the heights of the Citadel. The latter is a huge place, monumental and so far devoid of endurable acoustics. Yet, this area promises to be the most exciting operatic venue of all. It could be good-bye Luxor and mega-Aldas. Cairo could yet have its own operatic temple set up in the stars with the carpet of the living, brilliantly lit city beneath. But this venture will need the money to complete the area as living theatre, not a historical ruin which belongs in the history books.

With this grandiose area, Ezzat finds himself back home as once he spent a few years as the manager of the military museum which is a major part of the Citadel. History sweeps dramatically around these areas of Cairo. It needs now more than the eye of Ezzat-Cyclops to wave the magic wand. It needs the ear — an ear to turn music loose into all these splendid scenes which no other city can surpass or even equal. But where is the ear? Cairo has more than enough of the eyes, but not enough of the ears. For example, why not ditch *Aida* for a long swim in the Nile for a few years and mount in a refurbished Citadel Puccini's *Girl of the Golden West*? There is even a resident cast here for this opera.

Such possibilities concern Ezzat too. He knows it. But he places himself honestly and properly where he belongs — at the front of the house or hall. Audience safety, security (though he does not represent the security branch in these theatres) — these are his areas. He has nothing to do with what goes on from the proscenium backwards, from the stage to the rear of the theatre — these areas belong to policy offices, the artistic heart of the house. These belong to Nasser El-Ansari, Hassan Kani and Samir Zaki. Ezzat therefore lives

in the centre of a vast complicated web of activity — musical, dramatic, managerial, techno-commercial.

No wonder the opera world here has a headache. It has too many material things, not enough musical or spiritual ones. Cairo the city is lavish with its endless resources, would only an ear arrive with the lightning rod of authority to spark it all off into action. Cairo could then offer an unique festival of its own. Maybe this coming year will see the beginning of an artistic explosion which could render to Cairo its just desserts.

The man with the eyes — Serag Ezzat — admits his knowledge of music is limited to ground level. But he has an ear for orchestral performances, the ordinary listener's sound perception. For the opera, he remains quiet. His lifeline, up to the halls, has been dramatic enough. The army, war and peace, the military museum of the Citadel. Then, in 1988, to the Cairo Opera House as chief receptionist.

He says everything up to this day in his life was routine because he fell in love with the opera as an institution. Particularly, he fell for the Gezira Hall totally. He loves dashing around within its halls, never tiring. Opera houses thrive on this sort of energy. He is

pleased and proud to be the manager of the opera halls, not the opera bells, and he smiles. Hells and halls are not the same thing. It is easy to descend into the halls, difficult to keep in the celestial regions. Opera houses are scenes of jungle carnage, competitive to the last thrust of the dagger.

Operas have so many sectors and differing points of view, due of course to opera being a synthesis of all the major arts. The fuss of the halls, therefore, is justified; all opera houses suffer this: Milan, Vienna and Paris — not only Cairo. Yet in spite of the jungle warfare opera thrives. There are not enough seats or venues anywhere in any major city. So Cairo is fortunate in having all these places in which to seat audiences in spite of the fact that in many of them few sit. Serag Ezzat is behind the establishment, for example, in waving the tie and jacket flag for all male visitors. As for the female, they are allowed to come in almost anything. This gives the men the appearance of dressing in another century.

Cairo's opera audience, varied as it is, is still without roots and produces sharp comments. Sharpest of all — why have opera at all? That large area on Zamalek island might have been used as a swimming pool conglomerate or a unit for assisting homeless babies. Sink Mozart, get down to bedrock and turn that end of Zamalek island into a nuclear museum, keep with the times and go where the footballs fly.

And opera — it survives even this, and the crazy hell balls that hold it get larger and larger. Operatic management has become exceedingly technical. It is almost a system of computation. But Cairo seems to be learning to cope with this, too. With all these venues about — from Citadel to Nile — there are enough possible projects around to run well into the year 2000. For sure, in some way, whether in Superman suit or dark blue Armani, the man of the audience, Serag Ezzat, will be doing his crazy Cyclopean job in keeping his audiences safe and comfortable.



Books

George Abyad knew my father

Mudhakkirat Badie Khairi (The Memoirs of Badie Khairi), Badie Khairi, ed. Ibrahim Helmi Abdel-Rahman. Cairo: Supreme Council of Culture, 1996

Badie Khairi (1893-1966) grew up in one of Cairo's older quarters — in El-Migharbilin Street in El-Darb El-Ahmar. There is little in Khairi's origins that would have led anyone to predict his future great renown as playwright, lyricist and screenplay writer. He studied at the teacher training institute, and upon graduation began his working life as an employee of a telephone company. He was, however, let go of on account of his tardiness in channelling a telephone complaint from a certain Watson Pasha. Khairi, with few if any regrets, moved into teaching.

But throughout this unremarkable itinerary, indeed from childhood, Khairi had a passion for reading and acting. A friend of his father's was a friend of George Abyad, and Khairi put in a plea for an introduction and a minor role. His father's friend, unable to convince him that acting was not a career fit for respectable young men, complied. Khairi, however, failed with flying colours in George Abyad's audition.

Although at first his attempts at writing plays were restricted to the then popular mode of monologues, Khairi's big break came when he started collaborating with Naguib El-Rihani. Yet El-Rihani was to perform three plays written by Khairi before he became aware of their author's real name. There was a mediator between them, a Mr George Shifish, who claimed the plays were written by him. On his part, Khairi was content with splitting his wages with Shifish. When El-Rihani came to know the plays were written by Khairi, it was to mark the beginning of a life-long friendship and the true start of Khairi's career.

Yet Khairi, offered the chance of a lifetime for any Egyptian playwright at the time — to work with El-Rihani — was at first reluctant. He would, he said, write for El-Rihani, on condition that his name be nowhere mentioned. Theatre, at the time, was deemed the domain only of the riff-raff, and Khairi was not yet prepared to risk a solid career as teacher for what might anyway

prove a false start. His first play written for El-Rihani was *Ala Kaylak* (As You Like It), the second *Kullu Min Da* (All of us) — invariably in the popular musical revue mode with the hero, played by El-Rihani, as the unforgettable Kishkish Bey, the *winda* of Kaf El-Ballas.

The resounding success of these two plays was such that Khairi felt confident enough to resign his post as a teacher and start working as a professional playwright whose name was now tagged on all his works. Another fortuitous collaboration was begun at the time. In the wake of the 1919 Revolution, the Alexandrian musician and singer Sayed Darwish moved from his native city to Cairo at the invitation of George Abyad. The latter had commissioned him to set the music for his opera *Qayrouz Shah*.

Khairi lost no time spotting Darwish as a potentially ideal collaborator. Thus began the team of Khairi as author, Darwish as composer and El-Rihani as actor. This yielded three plays *Wa Law, Ish and Risa*. Darwish and Khairi were to become intimate friends until the former's death. Indeed, Darwish moved from Shubra to Geziret Badran where Khairi was living.

Khairi's memoirs, apart from chronicling a remarkable life, are peopled with examples of the leading figures of modern Egyptian art. We learn, too, about Darwish's spending habits — prodigal — his staunchness towards



Badie Khairi, teacher turned playwright, provides superb cameos of the theatrical giants of his day

his mother and friends, and his fragile ego which led him to boycott El-Rihani over the latter's well-meaning interference in his work.

We also get a glimpse into the complexities involved in producing a new record at the time. Records were pressed only once a year when a German technician came to Egypt for a few weeks to record the lyrics that had accumulated.

A vivid portrait is provided of singer-dancer Badia

Massabni whom Khairi first met when El-Rihani's troupe visited Syria. El-Rihani was taken by Massabni's voice, recruited her to join the troupe in Egypt and ended up marrying her. Ironically, while Massabni joined the troupe when it performed for the benefit of the Arab community in Brazil, Badie had to stay in Cairo to look after his sick mother. But he made the best of his time when El-Rihani's troupe was away for it was during this period that he met the nationalist financier Talaat Harb for whose troupe Khairi wrote *Fath El-Sudan*.

Khairi also provides hilarious sketches about the mutual ruses resorted to by Umm Kalboun and Naguib El-Rihani in their collaboration over a play that never saw the light. Then there was El-Rihani and Massabni's divorce and the former's sudden death one week before he was to move into his new villa. With El-Rihani's death, Khairi lost his closest friend and staunchest ally. A few years later, Khairi was to witness the death of his son Adel. The curtains were falling fast on the Rihani theatre and on the era for which it stood. It is an era that these memoirs bring very much to life.

Reviewed by Mahmoud El-Wardani

Plain Talk

That Cairo should have been chosen as the cultural capital of the Arab world by UNESCO comes as no surprise. Cairo was, and always will be, one of the most important cultural centres, not just in Egypt, but in the world. Few other cities, after all, can boast such a wealth of cultural landmarks, both ancient and modern.

The announcement of the UNESCO decision was made at a press conference by the minister of culture, Farouk Hosni was flanked by two of his most active officials, Nasser El-Ansari, chairman of the National Cultural Centre, known more familiarly as the Opera House, and Mohamed Ghoneim, under-secretary of State for Foreign Cultural Relations.

At the press conference an impressive programme was distributed, containing a full list of events between now and the end of the year. A number of journalists attending the press conference remarked that though the list was impressive, it contained no more than the usual range of cultural activities one finds in the metropolis. What these journalists had forgotten, apparently, is that UNESCO's choice is based on what a city actually has to offer, rather than on a programme concocted especially for the occasion. And of Cairo's perennial cultural activities, there is indeed much to be said.

The announcement of the choice of Cairo as regional cultural capital found me in reflective mood. My thoughts, naturally, turned to another occasion that merited a great celebration: the millennial anniversary of the founding of the city. This was in the late sixties. And as I walked through the narrow alleyways behind Al-Azhar, making my way to the beautifully restored El-Hirawi house, where the press conference was held, I was reminded of other, earlier descriptions of the city. The passages that came to mind were those in Stanley Lane Poole's *Cairo: Sketches of its History, Monuments and Social Life*, as well as those by Stanley's uncle, Edward Lane in *The Manners and Customs of the Modern Egyptians*.

Lane-Poole wrote: "We can still shut our eyes to the hotels and restaurants, the dusty grass plots and the European quarter, and turn away and wander in the labyrinth of narrow lanes which intersect the old parts of the city just as they did in the days of the Mameluke sultans."

Lane-Poole designates Cairo as one of the most interesting cities in the world, where artists never weary of reproducing "its picturesque scenes and crumbling ruins". Crumbling, that is, until the Ministry of Culture, in cooperation with a number of foreign cultural institutions and, of course UNESCO, embarked on an ambitious programme of preservation and protection of Egypt's incomparable heritage.

This column is not the place to reproduce the itinerary of events that will mark Cairo's year as a cultural capital. Such events are, in any case, covered as they occur in the Listings column opposite, a column that stands as testament to the varied cultural life of the city.

All departments of the ministry will, however, be co-ordinating their efforts under the chairmanship of Nasser El-Ansari in an attempt to furnish the Arab world with a cultural capital worthy of the name.

During the press conference we were on a firm ground, sitting in the Hirawi house, a marvelous example of traditional Islamic architecture. From such a vantage point we focused on the future, on an exciting programme most of which will be centred on that state of the art complex, the Opera House.

If I may be permitted a poetic flight of fancy, the choice of venue for such an announcement seemed to me metaphorical, emblematic even. What better image could I present for the activities that will comprise Cairo's year as a city of culture than this — the firm bedrock of tradition, on which the most modern artistic manifestations will be founded. There can be no art except one that acknowledges the art of the past. Nothing, as King Lear once famously said to his daughter, comes of nothing. But for Cairo, city of culture, there is no question of the year's events happening in a vacuum.

Let us hope, then, that the preparatory committee will complete their task conscientiously and diligently. To mark the occasion, the Opera House should stage at least one magnificent production of international standing.

Mursi Saad El-Din

Aida revisited

From her childhood in Cairo, to her much publicised opinion on Verdi's *Aida* and opera politics, **Ahmed Issawi** takes Egyptian born, New York Times music critic **Nimet Habachy**, on a tour of her career



Nimet Habachy grew up in Cairo, but left for the States when she was quite young. She was already an accomplished pianist following in the footsteps of her mother, who, had she stayed in Europe, would have become a professional pianist, says Habachy. "She was quite a fascinating woman. She left Cairo in the early thirties, alone, yes alone, when she was seventeen. She went to Germany where her uncle was studying chemistry, and she studied music."

Habachy grew up in an environment filled with music. Chopin and Franz Schubert had a particular impact on her. Another member of the family, her brother, was also influenced by her mother and Habachy remembers his piano playing during her childhood.

Christmas, in particular, was a time of intensive music making, the mother virtually creating a musical pageant. The children used to come down the stairs carrying candles as she was playing the piano. It is one of Habachy's fondest memories. Another lasting memory is "the wonderful voice of the muezzin from the minaret," and her father listening to the Qur'an all the time because of its beauty. She was brought up accustomed to beautiful voices, they were really central to her childhood, she explains.

She did not pursue musicology seriously in the States, although she continued with piano lessons. She still plays the piano. She went to drama school at Bryn Mawr, and then it was suggested that she should study opera. So she did for quite a long time, took voice lessons, and started showing "some promise." She played the guitar and sang in a few nightclubs in New York. "That was fashionable during sixties and seventies' college years," she comments. "Folk singing was the vogue, particularly in an all women's college like Bryn Mawr."

After drama school, she decided to follow up on her opera studies. She also needed to earn a living. She successfully applied for a desk job in the New York Opera company. Later, she became the company manager's assistant and the company's language trainer in French and Italian. It was very badly paid, but it was enough for her to be attached to an opera house. She continued with her voice lessons with the hope of joining the opera company singers, but that really never came to pass. However, she wound up singing in some amateur productions, including Georges Bizet's *Carmen*, and while doing that, a friend told her that the classical music station of the New York Times was desperately looking for women, who were minorities, and who spoke languages. "Go down and take the audition," advised the friend. She went, but flunked, because she sounded too British. "You know, I went to a British school in Cairo," she says. A colleague advised her to try again, a thing which would never have occurred to her, as she always took no for an answer. She asked if she could come back for another trial and they told her "maybe in three months." She began taking lessons on how to read commercials

and toned down her British accent. She also practiced on something which she had learned in drama school: "it is called the Eastern seaboard accent, a vaguely American, really a bit of hybrid accent," she explains. She was accepted and put on their reserve list, which meant that she could substitute. Within the first week she was asked if she would be prepared to work for the station for longer hours if the management decided to broadcast around the clock. She said yes, because she did not believe they would do it. It happened less than a year later. She was given her own overnight programme, and "we are now in our fourteenth year," says Habachy, obviously pleased at the outcome.

Nimet Habachy, as a famous music critic, may have reasons to be happy about her American career, but when it comes to Egyptian history and her coverage for the *New York Times* of the opera *Aida*, performed in Luxor a few years ago, she is suddenly very serious. She actually has a bone to pick with Khedive Ismail for whose glory *Aida* is meant to have been written.

"*Aida* unfortunately was a bit of a nationalist statement for Verdi, but not at all for Egypt, because *Aida* is in effect a symbol of European imperialism in Egypt," she says, and she particularly resents the Khedive's statement which he made after hosting all the great European powers for the opening of the Suez Canal in 1869: "At last I have made Egypt a part of Europe," he said, "a statement which is pathetic in its own light," comments Habachy.

The Khedive had been educated in France, she elaborates, he had known all the belles of Paris. One of the ladies dear to his heart was the real heroine of Verdi's opera *La Traviata*, which is the story of a Parisian courtesan. Her real name is Marie DuPlessis. She was the mistress of Alexandre Dumas and the heroine of his novel *La Dame aux Camélias*. She was the mistress of many important men including the Khedive and the composer Franz Liszt. This, according to Habachy, led to the Khedive to wanting a Verdi opera, but it should be noted that if Verdi did not accept, they were willing to offer the job to either Gounod, or Wagner which Habachy finds rather amusing. *Aida* was really a nineteenth century Italian opera playing in Cairo. As it was, *Aida* arrived one year late because of the Franco-Prussian war. *Aida* was not played in Cairo until one year after the Suez Canal opened, says Habachy. "They played *Rigoletto* instead."

But *Aida* was added to the enormous bill that Ismail owed Europe. Habachy seems to recall that she read the figure of 97 million pounds. By the time Disraeli bought the shares of the canal, Egypt's fate was sealed. The Khedive had been amassing a huge debt, part of it was for the opera, and part for the festivities of the opening of the Suez Canal, which included the building of what is now the Marriott Hotel, to accommodate Empress Eugénie. She came in disguise and stayed briefly, says Habachy, and



Opera *Aida* performed in Luxor

photo: Sherif Sonbol

the only reason she did it probably because she was the cousin of Ferdinand de Lesseps. "At any rate, *Aida* represents a part of that enormous amount that Ismail owed Europe, which enslaved us for 75 years. The 'Caisse de la dette' which was instituted shortly after the canal's opening was the final blow to the Khedive's prestige. By 1871, Egypt's debt was so high, and the economic situation so desperate that the Europeans were able to impose a 'Caisse de la dette' from which creditors were to be paid and which was supervised by British and French financiers, who then oversaw Egypt's finances ostensibly. Very soon, there was no branch of Egypt's government which was not run by Europeans, and eventually, the British completely took over ruling through Sir Evelyn Baring, who became later Lord Cromer, but was known in Egypt as 'Overbearing'. The story of *Aida*, and how it came to be, concludes Habachy, is, in a nutshell, the history of imperialism in Egypt.

Conceding that the period in which *Aida* was written was one of nationalist awakening in many parts of the world, Habachy does not dismiss the political implications of *Aida*, but she is prompt to point out that it came very late Verdi's life and that by then, Italy had achieved its own national aspirations. She thinks that Verdi

was more moved by curiosity about Mariette Pasha, a French journalist and "sometimes archeologist". By the time Verdi was doing *Aida* he had already made his nationalist statements. *Rigoletto*, the opera that was played in Cairo for the Suez Canal's opening, had to be toned down from the original play on which it was based, Victor Hugo's *Le Roi s'amuse*, because it could have reflected negatively on the king of Austria, so he was made instead into the Duke of Mantua, explains Habachy. *Aida* is a typical Verdi opera, suffused with his views, she says, but it is much less a political statement. With *Aida*, Verdi was more interested in ancient Egypt, according to Habachy Verdi did his homework: He tried his best to make the setting realistic, acquainting himself with this mysterious land, and the history of the Rosetta Stone. At the time, there was a fascination with things Egyptian, every piece of furniture in Napoleonic France had little sphinxes at the bottom. So all this was a little inspiration for someone like Verdi who lived a very European life, and had never seen these places. One of his famous words, reported when he was invited by the Khedive who wanted the presence of the master at the opening of *Aida*, was that he would not sail to Egypt because he was afraid of being "mummified."



Coming soon: "a tragedy near you"

When I was growing up, there was no television, and radio programmes did not exactly dedicate their airing time to shocking listeners out of their senses. News bulletins were read sedately three times a day, with hardly any changes in their content. They were rather reassuring. This is not to say that disasters did not occur every now and then in my day, but with no "on-the-spot" television coverage, by the time the information reached us, its full tragic impact had been somehow cushioned by the time gap. It was left to our imagination to adjust the images according to our tolerance to pain. Not that I believe one should never be confronted with hard realities; what I object to, rather, is the media's constant violation of our sensitivity and their total disregard for the nature of their public. Normal decency need not always be trampled on for the sake of sensationalism. I, as a child, led a sheltered life, secure in my daily routine. Very rarely did events from the outside penetrate my little world with any gory details. When this happened, it was by accident and it shook me deeply. From an early age I was aware of the fact that adults had access to the knowledge of excitingly horrible occurrences, but they always managed to keep such insights a well-guarded secret which never disturbed us. We children basked for long years in our ignorance of the harsher aspects of life. I remember one summer in Europe during which my parents were fascinated by what they cryptically referred to as the "Dominici Affair." Every day, they waited for the newspapers and pored over them, whispering. Having finished, they carefully destroyed several pages before allowing us to look at the comic strip. Years later I found out that the Dominici had been a family of holidaymakers who had been murdered while sleeping in their camper on a deserted road-side in the French countryside. I recalled having glimpsed the face of a little girl, the Dominici daughter I now realised, while peering over my mother's shoulder one day. Even though the murder had taken place years before, the face began to haunt me. I tried to imagine how it felt to be murdered and soon developed nightmares.

Times have changed. Today young children are treated to a glut of crime, violence, murders — single, multiple and incest — as well as blood-curdling horror movies on a daily basis. All they have to do is switch their TV on. Flipping through channels at random, it is often difficult to tell the difference, offhand, between action movies and the news at eight. Both are elaborately staged; news anchors and film makers alike strive for maximum sensationalism, the gorier the better. How do children sleep at night?

Last week I was watching a programme when the news of a plane crash flashed on the screen. As the details of the accident were transmitted bit by bit, I suddenly realised that a sort of immunity is generated by the massive doses of tragedy one is constantly forced to absorb unless one is prepared to take to the caves and commune with nature alone. The dividing line between fact and fiction, between real human suffering and make-believe, has become blurred. Is there a difference in a child's mind, for instance, between a fire destroying real houses and claiming lives, and the movie *The Towering Inferno*? The children of this generation have watched so many atrocities — natural or man-made — on screen, that one should not be surprised if they lose their natural capacity for compassion and, finally, all feelings.

Watching the tragedy of the plane which exploded off the coast of New York, I caught myself observing one of the school supervisors whose 16 pupils had died in the accident. "He is not showing enough emotion," I thought, as if evaluating his acting skills. Then I remembered that this was no movie. The television station was exploiting the catastrophe gleefully, zooming in on the parents' stunned, bitter tears, and creating the appropriate moments of suspense to keep their viewers interested. Nothing was too much: close-ups of the site of the accident with rescuers retrieving the children's personal belongings from the ocean; periodic announcements — made with appropriately muted grimaces of concern and regret — that there were no survivors; hints that the explosion may have been an act of terrorism (but then again maybe not) — but, above all, stay with us! Don't go away, we have more gory details in store: we will show you the suffering of relatives; the chaplains of various denominations explaining how they give comfort to the families; free advice from your friendly psychologist; and then, a talk show to wrap up the day — all in good time, between commercial breaks.

How do children react to such tragedy? Do they understand the horror of it all? Will they be forever afflicted with a fear of flying, or do they think that it is one more movie? If they don't get bored, if they wait till the end, maybe the plane, complete with passengers, will miraculously rise from the bottom of the ocean...

But they will not have to wait for long, because this particular tragedy will be brutally forgotten by tomorrow, replaced on the screen by new, up-to-the-minute atrocities rendered even more appalling in a bid to retain the viewers' attention.

Fayza Hassan

Forcing ends to meet

Enas Ahmed finds one of the many unsung heroines of the poor's battle for survival

Is it conceivable that a family can survive today on LE100 per month? It does not seem so, yet according to Institute of National Planning figures, some 6.9 million Egyptian families do survive on this sum or even less. It seems more than likely that most of these families manage to survive thanks to the little recognised, usually thankless, but relentless battle of their women members to make extremely strained ends meet.

Karima Hussein is one such woman: At 31, she has five children and a husband whose government salary is exactly 100 pounds. He spends LE10 on refreshments and cigarettes; she takes charge of the remaining LE90, and without any sense of

heroism, pays out LE20 for rent, water and electricity and goes on to feed, clothe, and entertain her family with the remainder.

Karima's family typically eats fried potatoes, beans and bread for breakfast. Sometimes they add cheese — the less expensive *arish* — to their meal. She says she tries to vary their meals and make sure they taste good. But sometimes there is not enough money for three full meals.

"I buy my vegetables in the afternoon so that I catch the grocers when they are trying to get rid of the vegetables which are not fresh," she explained.

She cannot afford to buy meat, so Karima purchases the bones of cows, cooks them with onions and peppers

and uses the broth to flavour vegetables.

"I cook a lot of rice to try and fill their [the children's] stomachs up," said Karima. Very sweet tea is the only desert the children enjoy since fruit is too expensive.

When special occasions arise, such as *Eid Al-Fitr* or *Eid Al-Adha*, it is customary to buy new clothes. "Before buying anything I visit the markets in Imbaba, Wakalet El-Balah and Ataba where the clothes are of good quality but cheap," Karima explained.

During the summer months, Karima works extra hard to entertain her children while they are out of school. Sometimes they go to a neighbour who may have a tele-

vision. Other outings are usually trips with friends and neighbours to the park and sometimes Helwan, Fayoum or Qanater. "Every woman cooks food to bring along," mentioned Karima.

Besides the daily chores and responsibilities, Karima must think of the future. She and her neighbours have set up a community money pool, known as a *gama'ya*. When it is Karima's turn to collect her money, she invests in gold jewellery "for a rainy day or when my children get married".

According to Professor Hoda Sobhi, a member of the Gender Policy and Planning Unit of the National Planning Institute, families living below the poverty line are obliged to

change their socio-economic traditions where the man is the only breadwinner. As a result, women are obliged to work in the informal sector for long hours and lower pay. The gender gap is due to the high rate of illiteracy among women, lack of professional experience, and social attitudes which undervalue the significance of women's contributions to the work force.

Karima tries to earn additional money by working small irregular jobs: "I package chopped vegetables in freezer bags for working women to store in exchange for a few pounds". She also sells pots of stuffed vegetables to women who have no time to make food that involves such hard work.

Supra Dayna

Chicken giblets and mushroom stew

Ingredients:

1 kilo chicken giblets
1 onion (finely chopped)
1 tsp. crushed garlic
2 tbsp. white flour
1 large can of mushrooms in brine
Butter
Salt/pepper/allspice/cinnamon/onion powder (grated)

Method:

Wash the giblets and clean them of any unnecessary fat or skin particles, then cut each part into two or three pieces except the hearts which should be split in the middle without being cut in two. Season the giblets with salt and pepper and place them in a strainer to get rid of the excessive residue of liquid. In a cooking pan, melt some butter then stir-fry the onion and garlic until golden, then add the giblets and stir-fry over high heat until done. Add the flour and continue stirring until it mixes well with all other ingredients. Stir in the mushrooms with their brine and place them in a strainer to get rid of the excessive residue of liquid. Add the chicken stock, season, cover and simmer over low heat. Ten minutes later uncover and gently stir, then cover again and leave the stew to cook (approx. 30 minutes). Serve with rice and green salad.

Moushira Abdel-Malek

Restaurant review

Back to basics

Nigel Ryan returns to school

"In various mock-tudor bars they talk of sports and makes of cars"

John Betjeman would not have liked Harry's Pub at the Marriott Hotel and one can sympathise with his prejudices. At night it is hugely popular — loud music, loud voices, loud shirts and little else. During the day, an off week day though, it is a different place altogether. By 4 o'clock in the afternoon it is practically empty, no music is being played, and there is a refreshing degree of sartorial restraint. The gloom remains unbroken by acid flashes of orange and lime, unbuttoned just a little too far and invariably on the backs of those inclined to swagger. One can even begin to forgive the mock-tudor excess, the dark veneered fireplace, the flock wallpaper and brass light fixtures, the ersatz ye olde England look. There is also a buffet, which is, surprise, surprisingly good value.

There is not a great deal of choice. The afternoon I ventured in there was a table with basic salad ingredients, a tray with roast beef, one with pureed potatoes and a third containing gravy. It is all very basic and very unpretentious. The roast beef is very well roasted, the potatoes are very well mashed and the gravy is thick. The salad consists of a bowl of lettuce, a bowl of tomatoes, a bowl of cucumber and one of dressing. I think I also spied tskina, though refrained from tasting the contents of that particular bowl.

But what the buffet lacked in excitement it more than made up for in the reassurance stakes. This was nursery food, school food, and rather good school food at that. It has its place,

and if that place boasts velvet wallpaper then so be it. Apart from the buffet there is also a printed menu, and purely out of a sense of duty I supplemented my school dinner with a grilled chicken quesadilla, described as "hot and smoky strips of chicken served with guacamole, salsa and sour cream". It is not the sort of thing that ever made its way onto the tables in my school dining room, but a sense of duty won the day and in the interest of fairness I duly ordered the smoky strips.

The dish came, strips of chicken served in a flat, floury loaf, with bits of green pepper and true to its promises, topped with three dollops, one of sour cream, one of guacamole, and one of salsa, which together comprised the most discordant color scheme encountered all afternoon. A blessing, now the quesadilla was not bad, though a little greasy, but it was certainly not a patch on the roast beef and mashed potatoes.

Pub food, in the end, is best kept as simple as possible. Buffets, as a general rule of thumb, are better. The few things are on offer. I don't know if I should feel a little embarrassed about recommending overdone beef and mash, but I do, wholeheartedly — recommend that is. And maybe it is only nostalgia, but nostalgia has its place at the table.

The bill, for two, which included two local beers, came to less than LE60, which, considering that my lunch time companion made a second trip to the buffet, for yet more beef and potatoes, is really far from expensive. So go, go at lunch time, and enjoy. It may not be food to write home about, but I for one left feeling happier than when I entered.

Harry's Pub, Marriott Hotel, Zamalek.

Al-Ahram Weekly Crossword

By Samia Abdenour

- ACROSS
- Gamins (4)
 - Postures (5)
 - Circus performer's ring (4)
 - Money-exchange business (4)
 - Occurrence (5)
 - Bacchanalia (4)
 - Shoot-out between two persons (4)
 - Stage in development of insect (5)
 - On the sheltered side (4)
 - Abandon (6)
 - Lane off main road (8)
 - Colours: liquid assets (4)
 - Owens (3)
 - Went (5)
 - Supplement (3)
 - Insurrectionist (5)
 - Scandinavian units of currency (4)
 - Server of drinks (6)
 - Initials of a US pro
- DOWN
- Actor Alan ... (4)
 - Malarial fever (4)
 - Kicks the bucket (4)
 - Person committing of fence against grammar or idioms (8)
 - Bombards: raw skins (5)
 - Eggs (3)
 - A Slavonic native (4)
 - fessional organisation (3)
 - Smart-aleck (4)
 - Palestinians, Syrians et al. (5)
 - Run at moderate pace (4)
 - Weather directions (3)
 - Fragrant essential oils, pl. (6)
 - Fixed routine (4)
 - Lucifer. (5)
 - Foxy (3)
 - Collier (5)
 - Expression of contempt (3)
 - Agape (4)
 - Sail too near the wind (8)
 - Mystery (6)
 - Footwear (4)
 - Story of martial feats (5)
 - Performer (4)
 - Morose (4)
 - Spaces devoid of matter (5)
 - Poker stake (4)
 - Masters (4)
 - Kneel, jumbled (5)
 - Phys: Semicircular electrodes in cyclotron (4)
 - Covetousness (4)
 - Pile (5)
 - Raspy (6)
 - Narrow band near edge of shield (4)
 - S-shaped line; or double curved moulding (4)
 - Type, jumbled (4)
 - Deserter (3)
 - Small mountain lake (4)
 - Nuclei (6)
 - Aspires (5)
 - Sphere of action (5)
 - Head-dress (5)
 - South African enclosure for sheep and cattle (5)
 - Thing in rudimentary stage (6)
 - European nobleman (5)
 - Sentimentalize (5)
 - Not now (5)
 - Bludgeon; pummel (3)
 - Moke (3)
 - Port-of-Spain is its capital (8)
 - Presently (4)
 - Reduces (6)
 - Humans (3)
 - Diagonal rib of vault (5)
 - To cycle (5)
 - Records (4)
 - ... me tangerine — not to be touched (4)
 - Stern (4)
 - Vivacity (4)
 - Asian staple food (4)
 - Departed (4)
 - Allocate (4)
 - God of War (4)
 - Guillemot (3)

Last week's solution

فَكْزَا مِنَ الْأَصْلِ

Al-Ahram: A Diwan of contemporary life

The 1880s and 1890s brought rapid urban growth in Egypt. Not only did Egyptian cities change in scale, they changed in concept.

Cairo of the late 19th century illustrates this. Between 1882 and 1898 its population grew from 374,838 to 570,662. The city itself burgeoned beyond the old city walls and its intricate network of narrow streets and alleys to breed and encompass new suburban neighbourhoods that differed radically in design and in demographic composition. Cairo, like most other Egyptian cities, became two cities in one, vividly juxtaposing the old parts inhabited by poor alley people against the new neighbourhoods where affluent and sophisticated people resided.

The old quarters in Egyptian cities had deteriorated drastically since the Ottoman era. The walls and quarters that had contained, protected and organised the social and economic lives of the crafts guilds and the denominational communities had collapsed and their inhabitants now had to brave an unfamiliar world that was encroaching upon them from outside. The flood of European goods entering the markets shook the foundations of the occupational guilds. The growth of the centralised modern state sapped the remaining influence of the masters of the guilds. Their once powerful head, the *sheikh al-hara* (alley elder), became little more than a local functionary whom the government could appoint or dismiss at will. Indeed, already by mid-century, the *sheikh al-hara* who had formerly been an influential mediator between the people and the powers that be, was simply handing out construction licences, authenticating people's bureaucratic certificates and identifying wanted criminals.

As their social and economic conditions deteriorated, people sought to escape the cramped medieval quarters. Escape was never final, however. They brought to the world outside the old city walls their traditional ways of dress, their customs and their familiar patterns of interaction. More often than not, their furlough was brief, ending at nightfall or after a stretch of a few days.

The modern quarters, meanwhile, arose in response to the social, economic and demographic changes that took place during the latter half of the 19th century. The growing *effendi* class of government bureaucrats gave rise to such districts as Shubra and Abbessiya, with their broad tree-lined streets and modern housing blocks. With the advent of capitalism and the influx of large numbers of foreigners, new European-style neighbourhoods sprang up in areas at a comfortable remove from the old quarters. Zamalek and Garden City in Cairo, Helwan, El-Ram in Alexandria, and many of the foreign — as opposed to the 'Arab' or native — quarters in the cities of the Suez Canal and the Delta still preserve that flavour of turn of the century tranquillity and elegance.

Rural to urban immigration also contributed to the development of the cities. The poor found their way to the shanty-towns that began to spring up on the outskirts; the rich — that growing sector of middle

and large landowners — began to leave their country estates and take up at least semi-permanent residence in the cities, particularly in the capital. There they could be on hand to conduct and monitor their growing business and financial concerns. Modern schooling for their children was only available in the cities. Another consideration was the many attractions of city life — the theatres, restaurants, parks and other avenues of luxury and entertainment in which these propertied classes felt they had a right to partake. Last but not least, they would be in closer proximity to the centres of political power in which they were also seeking greater influence and involvement.

The modern world in Egypt was not entirely cut off from the old. Indeed, it depended on many of the services that the poor could provide. But, to the well-off residents of Egypt's modern districts, the denizens who were emerging from behind the old city walls must have appeared quite alien. The 'alley people' was a euphemism that thinly veiled their contempt for the cities' original inhabitants. This was not just the attitude of the powers that be. It was the attitude of the owners and editors of *Al-Ahram*, who, after all, were an integral part of a growing new order that was revolved by the old.

The following story from *Al-Ahram* illustrates this spirit. Covering a large brawl that broke out among the 'alley people', its 18 March 1887 edition reports: "Yesterday evening at 9pm, rival gangs of ruffians from Daoudiya Alley and El-Sananiya Alley clashed with quarterstaffs, inflicting serious injuries on several persons. Then they split up into two warring parties that rampaged through the streets, breaking street lamps and insulting passers-by, until they reached Mohamed Ali Street where they set upon one another again. Eventually the mob broke up of its own accord, because the police, having found themselves insufficient in force, remained neutral."

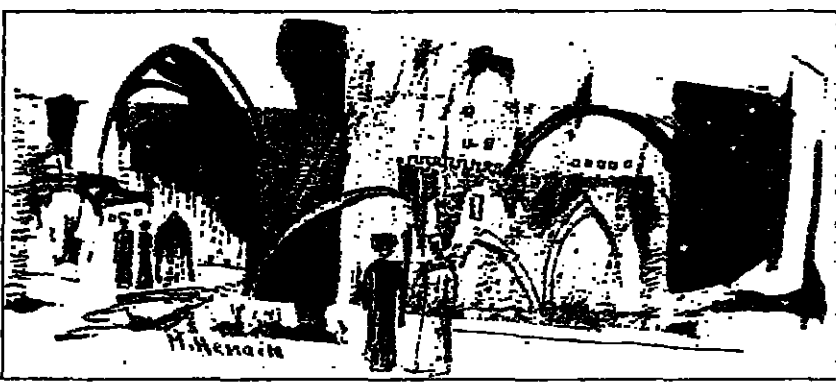
The incident, frequently repeated among rival street gangs, illustrates how strongly the spirit of chavirism could bind members of a single alley in times of need. It reflected a deep mistrust of strangers and as a traditional war cry against perceived threats, it could rally the people of the alley in a flash into fighting packs, wielding their traditional *nababti* or quarterstaffs. Impervious, at first, to the implications of a growing centralised state that would not tolerate any detractor from its prestige, they would soon have to contend with its symbols of law enforcement, the police, against whose modern arms the *nababti* stood no chance.

Indeed, the day after this incident, the government went into action. The police arrested nearly 50 people and put them in prison. Then the prime minister and the minister of the interior summoned the police commissioner of Cairo to investigate the matter and to pursue it thoroughly until all the offenders and all the causes are discovered in accordance with the will of His Royal Highness the Khedive.

Al-Ahram, too, was interested in pursuing the causes of this fight. At first it ap-

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The last two decades of the 19th century witnessed a rapid growth of urbanisation in Egypt, leading to the creation within cities and on their fringes of modern neighbourhoods in the vicinity of old, decrepit and overcrowded districts. Rich people, government bureaucrats and propertied classes lived in the new areas, while the old ones were inhabited by the poor, generally known at the time as the 'alley people'. This created problems of law and order that the authorities had to deal with by legislation. In this statement of his survey of Egypt's modern history as chronicled by *Al-Ahram*, Dr Yunan Labib Rizq tells the story



peared to play it down, saying that the purpose of the gangs' rampage through the streets was to heckle one another, not to actually engage in a brawl. However, the brawl did occur. Not only that, but it spilled out into one of Cairo's modern neighbourhoods and disturbed its inhabitants. This the government could not treat lightly, as the following news report of 10 days later tells us:

"The investigation of the incident in El-Daoudiya and El-Sananiya alleys has concluded. Twenty of the individuals detained have been charged and the case has been referred to the general prosecutor." In casting its own verdict, the newspaper was not as lenient as before. It said, "We hope that these ruffians are treated in accordance with the harshest strictures of the law so that they do not repeat these wicked acts and so that they may serve as examples to others like them, thus preventing the rent in the garment from spreading."

Al-Ahram's plea was to no avail. Several weeks later a fight broke out between gangs of 'ruffians' in Tulun where they continued to assault each other with their quarterstaffs for more than an hour until most of them sustained heavy injuries. *Al-Ahram* was incensed that, because the police station had been removed from that quarter, there were no police on the scene. It also berated the *sheikh al-hara* for not having notified the authorities in time. It concluded, "We therefore ask the government to restore this police station or to station some policemen in that neighbourhood and to replace the alley's *sheikh* with someone who will be conscientious about

notifying the authorities when such an incident occurs."

More disturbing to the tranquillity of the new residential neighbourhoods than these violent mass assaults were sallies by the alley people in small warring groups. *Al-Ahram* received numerous complaints in this regard, particularly from neighbourhoods such as Erbekiya, with its grand gardens, large European hotels and luxurious shops a short walking distance from the cramped medieval alleyways. The following article typifies the reaction. "The government has decided to instruct the police in the capital to arrest all ruffians who are roaming around Erbekiya Gardens and other streets of the capital, assaulting pedestrians with filthy language and shameful acts."

We hear similar complaints from Alexandria. On 31 January 1894, *Al-Ahram* reports that the police have arrested a great number of vagabonds and alley archers. The occasion for this crackdown was the forthcoming holiday celebrated by the European residents in the city and since Europeans were involved *Al-Ahram* covered the incident closely. On this occasion, the alley people "had amassed in gangs armed with sticks and metal bars and set about attacking one another in a ferocious battle that resulted in many cracked heads and broken arms."

The frequency of these incidents, the disruption they caused to the tranquillity of respectable citizens, the affront they posed to the prestige of the government, not to mention the noted absence of the police in many instances, meant that the authorities

would have to take a firmer and more organised stance. Legal measures were forthcoming.

In June 1891 *Al-Ahram* published reports that the Council of Ministers was planning to promulgate a "vagrancy law which will punish those who have no occupation and no shelter by imprisoning them for eight days. If they are caught again they will be punished by a prison sentence of one to three years." The law was primarily intended to protect the new residential quarters from the mendicants who were wandering their way to the cities in great numbers, not just from rural Egypt but from other areas in the Mediterranean.

More pertinent here, the new law was intended to safeguard the modern suburbs from the encroachments of the denizens of the old quarters. Indeed, it was used to pursue them to their very lairs, where the police would raid their homes without a court warrant. Frequently, the police enlisted the help of the *sheikh al-hara* to inform against suspected "trouble makers", who would be kept "under disciplinary surveillance", whereby the "troublemakers" had to be home by sunset and were forbidden to leave their home before dawn. People could be condemned to this form of house arrest for up to three years.

More significant was a provision of the vagrancy law that meted out collective punishment on the alley inhabitants, in violation of the established legal principle that punishment should befall only those who commit the crime. According to the regulations of the law, "in the event of a disturbance of the peace in a particular area, the Ministry of Interior, upon the request of the governor or the inspector general of the police, may issue an order to increase the number of police in that area temporarily. The extraordinary expenses incurred by this measure shall be assumed by the residents of the area in which the disturbance occurred."

The vagrancy law was passed in its final form on 12 August 1892. As *Al-Ahram* wrote, it targeted "those who have no means of livelihood and no gainful employ as well as those who seek to earn their living through gambling and fortune telling." Caught in the crunch of progress, many of the alley people would fall into these categories. Not only did the tantalising European-made products and the new consumer values erode the foundations of the local crafts and guilds, other developments would make various castes of workers redundant. The "fresh water companies" and indoor plumbing put the traditional water-carriers out of work, the arrival of electricity into public buildings, stores and eventually private homes replaced the street lamp lighters and candlemen and carriage drivers were made redundant by the "electric tramway" lines that began to sprawl over the length and breadth of Egypt's cities.

It was not long however, before those engaged in traditional occupations learned, if not how to circumvent the new law, at least how to avoid its consequences. The street merchants and door-to-door salesmen, for example, "put their wives and children in charge of the jobs, and, now,

instead of seeing a hundred men calling out their wares in the street, we see perhaps only 40, the rest being underage children and women carrying suckling babies."

Since the police concentrated their efforts in the modern middle class neighbourhoods that abutted the old districts, the effect was to drive the "vagrants" to the outskirts of the city. Their new haunts were now the newly developed suburbs inhabited by the landed gentry who had moved to the city, and the residents did not take kindly to this development. Voicing the complaints of the "notables" in these areas, *Al-Ahram* said, "The police are not energetic enough in apprehending the vagrants, whose numbers have multiplied enormously in the outlying districts of the city. We ask them to turn their attention to this matter as a precaution against damage."

The numerous complaints lodged by the residents of the upper class neighbourhoods against the "riffraff" spurred the authorities into action. At the beginning of 1894, they introduced certain amendments to the vagrancy law. Now the police no longer had to issue an official notification prior to the arrest of a suspect. "Such advance warning in the past gave the vagrant time to flee the city," asserted *Al-Ahram*.

At the same time, the authorities put greater pressure on the *sheikh al-hara* to fulfil his function as an informer. On 6 September 1893 for example *Al-Ahram* reports on a meeting between the governor of Cairo and the *sheikhs* of the alleys. According to the report, the governor told them of the numerous complaints against the street brawls and the harassment of pedestrians. The *sheikhs* must be more vigilant in performing their duties, if they do not want to put their jobs at risk, he told them.

As one might expect, many of these *sheikhs* abused the powers conferred upon them. *Al-Ahram's* correspondent from Tanta relays "the grievances of the inhabitants against the tyranny of these *sheikhs* and their collusion with the police." Also, like many other traditional professions, the position of the *sheikh al-hara* was frequently passed down from father to son. As often as not, the son would not have the same integrity as his father, which was the source of another frequent complaint.

It is not a pretty picture that *Al-Ahram*, and other newspapers of the epoch, give us of the inhabitants of Egypt's old city quarters. It was an image that would remain imbedded in the national consciousness well into the middle of the 20th century, when a new media, the cinema, and such directors as Salah Abu Seif would do much to change the popular conception of the "alley people."

The author is a professor of history and head of Al-Ahram History Studies Centre.

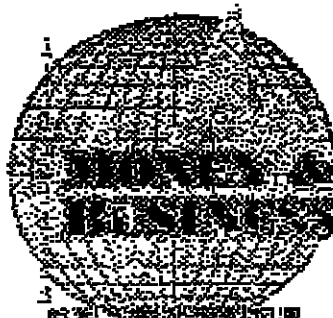


NBE honours renowned scientists

TO SUPPORT development in all branches of science in Egypt, the National Bank of Egypt (NBE), will grant 5 awards of LE5000 each in appreciation of scientists' roles in their fields. Mohamed Madbol, vice-chairman of NBE handed the awards to this year's winners, among whom were Dr Ahmed Mustegir, an agriculturist; Dr Salaheddin Helmi, a medical scientist; Dr Abdel-Hadi Hosni, an engineer and Dr Ahmed Gamal, an agriculturist.

These awards, known as the National Bank of Egypt Awards for Scientific Innovation, will be awarded annually.

MONEY & BUSINESS



Investments in Tenth of Ramadan

ABOUT 106 projects were set up in Tenth of Ramadan City with a total capital of LE1bn. These projects are expected to provide 16,334 job opportunities. Saudi Arabia is at the forefront of investors in Tenth of Ramadan, with 23 projects having a total capital of LE250mn. As for the kind of projects, weaving and spinning ventures come at top of the list with 112 projects established, food processing ventures with 68 projects, followed by 28 plastics ventures were set up.

Institute for small industries in the new cities

WITH THE aim of making further accomplishments, the Egyptian Industries Federation sent a delegation, headed by Mamdouh Thabit Makki, deputy of the federation and member of the People's Assembly, to Geneva to attend meetings of the International Labour Organisation. Among the major goals achieved as a result of these meetings was an agreement to establish an institute for small industries in each of the new industrial cities. A number of studies dealing with this project are currently under-

way. The required financing, Makki stated, would be provided mainly by the Social Development Fund.

The idea to establish such institutes emerged during the International Labour Organisation's meeting. Thus, the organisation gave its approval to the general outline of the project. That the organisation had previously established the Labour University in Cairo reflects the firm belief in Egypt and its leading role in the region to develop small industries.

He added that the organisation will share in providing the expertise, technical know-how, implementation and training for the institutions. Makki said that the importance of establishing this institute lies in serving small industries and to prepare qualified cadres to work within these industries, which play an important role in economic development in light of the national economic reform programme, as these industries count as one of the factors in bringing the export balance up.

Win a bicycle from Coca-Cola

IN ONE of the largest contests of its kind, Coca-Cola Egypt will give away bicycles to its customers. To win one, simply look for the picture of a bicycle under the cap of any sized bottle of Coca-Cola. If you find one — you win!

Hasan Khalifa, regional manager for Coca-Cola, said that the company has decided to

give away more than 20 thousand bicycles to its customers.

Khalifa added that the idea of giving away bicycles is a novel one, for not only does it reflect the company's interest in environmental conservation and solving traffic problems, but it also encourages young people to take up a sporting activity.

Major companies in the de-

veloping world always have numerous functions outside their economic role. These new functions seek to protect society and develop the potentials of its youth. Coca-Cola, its parent and branch companies throughout the world, are keen to work in all these areas in order to gain the confidence of its customers and promote its products.

Accusations investigated

ACCUSATIONS of dumping by Egyptian companies have been responded to by delegations from the Anti-Dumping Authority of the Ministry of Trade. One delegation has been sent to South Africa to investigate accusations, made by the government against Egyptian aluminium export companies. El-Sayed Abul-Qasim, head of the foreign trade sector, said that authorities in South Africa announced the beginning of investigations on Egyptian companies exporting aluminium to South Africa, after a series of complaints by South African factories.

A second high-level delegation left for Brussels to attend hearing sessions held by the EU to discuss allegations of Egyptian companies flooding the European market with cotton.

Abul-Qasim stated that the delegations' mission will be to defend the accused companies by providing them with technical and legal assistance.

Hi-tech computer for Egyptian tourism

THE UNIQUE — and world-wide PROGIS system was introduced to the tourism industry during an exhibition fair at the Nile Hilton.

On a CD-Rom, this is the only one existing system in the entire world which combines and interlinks photos, including satellite photos, motion pictures, easy access to a built-in database, the geographic positioning system, important for immediate map-spotting and easy access to multi-media.

Seen in the photo are Dr



Hussein M El-Azhari, vice-president of HAYA International Trading Group SAE, who demonstrated this unique device to Mr Samir Halawa, president of Misr Travel and Mr Nazmi M.

Youssef, director of marketing and publications of Misr Travel. Partly seen is Mr Ulf F. Wehren of Green Ice International, the GSA for Egypt's touristic establishments.

\$ 500 million authorized capital

\$100 million issued and paid up capital

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Benha branch Tel:227861 - 227862

Mansoura branch Tel:329965 - 328792

Mahala branch Tel:237708 - 231708

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Sohag branch Tel:324792 - 324795



The team of restorers is cleaning all decorative items on the walls and ceilings



El-Kritliya restored

Though the Gayer Anderson Museum, widely known as Beit El-Kritliya, or House of the Cretan Woman, is undergoing restoration, is still open to the public. Nevine El-Aref takes a tour

The Gayer Anderson Museum is one of the most attractive medieval houses of Cairo and one most frequently visited by tourists. It lies to the southeast of the Mosque of Ibn Tulun in El-Sayeda Zeinab. Considered a living embodiment of typical Turkish late medieval houses, it is made up of two 16th and 17th century houses that are separated by a narrow alleyway known as Afet El-Gam'ie (the cul-de-sac mosque). Both buildings were originally restored and furnished by Major General Gayer Anderson who was so charmed by the architectural style of the houses that he bought them and spent a fortune on furniture and restoration.

Anderson lived in the houses from 1935 to 1942 and, before his death, made arrangements to entitle the Egyptian government to maintain both houses as a museum carrying his name. The current restoration

by the Supreme Council of Antiquities (SCA), underway for two months now and expected to continue for several more, aims at providing more facilities and services to visitors.

Restoration started on the museum's second floor, originally the *haramlik* (women's quarters). A team of restorers is cleaning all decorative items on the walls and ceiling and are restoring or replacing damaged *mashrabiyas* (wooden lattice-work). "Special chemical solutions are being used in the cleaning of artefacts to preserve their original colours and designs," said Ahmad Hosni, a fine art restorer who explained that other chemicals are being used to brighten the colours.

Apart from restoration of the museum itself, said Mohsen Rashid, assistant director of the Gayer Anderson Museum, an administrative building is now under construction in the garden area. The new building

is in the same style as the museum and comprises a cafeteria, storerooms, toilets, additional administrative halls and rooms dedicated to maintenance and restoration.

The Gayer Anderson Museum underwent full restoration after 1992, when a large part of the museum was found to be suffering from cracks in the walls which indicated the decaying condition of the building.

The construction of the first of these houses dates back to 1540. It was built by Mohamed Abdel-Qader El-Hadad and later called the house of Anna Bint Salem, the name of its last owner. The most interesting part of the house is the large *qa'a* (hall) on the ground floor which features a fine polychrome central fountain, richly decorated ceiling beams, *kilim* (decorative carpets), covered pillows and *mashrabiyas* windows in the upper gallery from which the ladies could look down on the entertainment below. This *qa'a* is a reflection of life in pre-modern Cairo.

The second house of the Gayer Anderson Museum was built in 1631 by Mohamed Ben-Salem Ben-Gelman El-Gazzar. Later known as Beit El-Kritliya, the house was ascribed to its last inhabitant — a woman who originally came from Crete. The house once

had a *sabil* (a free water dispenser), a rare feature of private residences. The *sabil* area now houses offices for museum officials.

The two houses have three floors apiece, each of which contain a large number of rooms named after different countries according to the style of decoration and furniture collected by Gayer Anderson. Most of the rooms have an Oriental flare.

The Persian room, for example, is furnished with gorgeous Iranian-made furniture and carpets. It was once the bedroom of Gayer Anderson and his footman. The Damascus room, one of the most remarkable, is a reflection of a typical 13th century bedroom in Syria. The rooms are adorned with mirrors and a large number of vases. The Byzantine room is rich in fine Byzantine and Coptic works of art.

Unlike these Oriental rooms, Queen Anne's room — a dining-room — has a distinguishable English style of furnishing. Another unique room in the Gayer Anderson Museum is the picture room which contains a large number of paintings reflecting different trends of art.

The entrance to the museum is near the southeastern exit of the Mosque of Ibn Tulun.



Restoration of doors of the second floor Haramlik

photos: Mohamed Wassim

Action in Giza

Ring Road

THE EGYPTIAN archaeological mission at Giza has found a cemetery that dates to the New Kingdom beside the Ring Road. It consists of many rock-cut tombs, each containing a wooden sarcophagus decorated with hieroglyphic texts, cartouches of kings and the name of the god Sokar-Osiris, the god of the dead in Saqqara.

A small mummy, 25cm in length and covered with linen, was found inside each sarcophagus. "The discovery was very confusing for researchers because the size of the bodies are smaller than a baby's body," said Zahi Hawass, director-general of the Giza Plateau, who explained that after exposing the mummies to x-rays, they were revealed to be small statues of Sokar-Osiris. Hawass said that only 30 tombs have been discovered so far. The excavations scheduled to restart in October might reveal the mystery behind the cemetery, which is believed to contain as many as 2,000 tombs.

Khafre's Pyramid

JULY witnessed the inauguration of the Pyramid of Khafre after three months of restoration. No tickets fees will be imposed, said Hawass, since visits to the pyramid are included in the fee to access the entire Giza Plateau.

Restoration

IMMEDIATELY after Khafre's Pyramid reopens, the Pyramid of Menkaure — the third and smallest — will be closed to the public for restoration. The pyramid is in a critical condition: humidity has reached 80 per cent, the walls are full of graffiti and parts of the stairway inside the pyramid are broken.

Hawass said that new ventilation and lighting systems will be installed. As for external restoration, the collapsed granite blocks will be documented and then replaced in their original positions. The restoration project will be carried out by the Supreme Council of Antiquities (SCA) and the American Research Center in Egypt (ARCE). The SCA will provide labour and tools while the ARCE will fund the entire project and provide equipment to replace the fallen blocks into their original position.

Hawass said that all fallen granite blocks found at the southern and western sides of the pyramid have already been documented.

New excavation

THE SCA's Egyptian archaeological mission will start excavations near Menkaure's pyramid in an effort to re-discover the noblemen's cemetery originally discovered by Austrian Egyptologist Genge Reissner.

Compiled by

Nevine El-Aref

How to get there

Buses

Super Jet, East Delta and West Delta buses operate throughout Egypt.

Super Jet stations are located in Almazna (Heliopolis), Tahrir, Giza, Ramsis Street and Cairo Airport. Buses travel to Alexandria, Port Said, Hurgada and Sinai. Tel. 772-663.

Cairo-Alexandria: Services almost every half hour from 5.30am to 10pm, from Tahrir, then Giza, Almazna and the airport. Tickets LE19 until 9pm, LE21 thereafter; from the airport LE24 until 5pm, LE30 thereafter. A VIP bus with phone access leaves Almazna at 7.15am. Tickets from Almazna LE28; from the airport LE32 each way.

Cairo-Port Said: Services every half hour from 6am to 8am; then 9am, 10am, 3pm, and 4.30pm, from Almazna, then Ramsis Street. Tickets LE15 each way.

Alexandria-Port Said: Service 6.45am, from Ramsis Square in Alexandria. Departs Port Said 3.30pm. Tickets LE22 each way.

Cairo-Hurgada: Services 8am and 2pm, from Tahrir, then Giza and Almazna. Departs Hurgada noon and 5pm. Tickets LE40 until 5pm, LE45 thereafter, both each way.

Alexandria-Hurgada: Service 8pm, from Ramsis Square, Alexandria. Departs Hurgada 2.30pm. Tickets LE60 each way.

Cairo-Sharm El-Sheikh: Service 11pm, from Tahrir, then Almazna. Departs Sharm El-Sheikh 11pm. Tickets LE50 each way.

East Delta Bus Company: Buses travel to North Sinai, South Sinai, Suez and Ismailia. Buses to Ismailia and Suez depart from Qalbi (near Ramsis Square), Almazna and Tahrir Square (near Heliopolis). Buses to North and South Sinai depart from the Sinai bus station at Abbassia Square. Tel. 482-4733.

Cairo-Ismailia: Services every 45 minutes from 6.30am to 6pm, from Qalbi, then Almazna and Tahrir Square. Tickets LE11; air-conditioned bus LE13, one way.

Cairo-Suez: Services every half an hour from 6am to 7pm, from Qalbi, then Almazna and Tahrir Square. Tickets LE11; air-conditioned bus LE13, one way.

Cairo-El-Arish: Services every hour from 7.30am to 4pm, from Qalbi, then Almazna and Tahrir Square. Tickets LE11; air-conditioned bus LE13, one way.

Cairo-Sharm El-Sheikh: Services every 45 min. from 7am to 6.30pm from Almazna, then Almazna and Tahrir Square. Tickets LE11; air-conditioned bus LE13, one way.

Cairo-Nuweila: Service 8am, from Abbassia, then Almazna. Tickets LE36 one way.

West Delta Bus: Stations at Tahrir and Almazna. Tel. 243-1846.

Cairo-Hurgada: Services 9am, noon, 3pm, 10.30pm, 10.45pm and 11pm. Tickets LE30 one way.

Cairo-Safage: Services 9am and 3pm. Tickets LE35 one way.

Cairo-Dussak: Service 10pm. Tickets LE36 one way.

Cairo-Luxor: Service 9am. Tickets LE35 one way.

Cairo-Aswan: Service 5pm. Tickets LE30 one way.

Trains

Trains run to Alexandria, Port Said, Luxor and Aswan, from Ramsis

Station. Tel. 147 or 575-3555.

Cairo-Luxor: Aswan "French" deluxe trains with sleepers. Services to Luxor and Aswan 7.40pm and 9pm (reaching Luxor 6.40 am and 8am, Aswan 8.40am and 10am). Tickets to Luxor LE294 for foreigners and LE129 for Egyptians; to Aswan LE300 for foreigners; LE141 for Egyptians.

"Spanish" deluxe trains without sleepers. Services to Luxor and Aswan 6.45pm, 8.45pm and 8.45pm. Tickets to Luxor: first class LE51; second class LE31. Tickets to Aswan: first class LE63; second class LE37.

Cairo-Alexandria "Torbini" trains. VIP train: Service 8am. Tickets first class LE22; without a meal, LE22 without a meal. Standard trains: Services 9am, 11am, noon, 5pm and 7pm. Tickets first class LE22; second class LE17.

"French" trains. Services hourly from 6am to 10.30pm. Tickets first class LE20; second class LE12.

Cairo-Port Said: Services 6.30am and 8.45am. Tickets first class LE45; second class LE26.

EgyptAir

There are between two and five domestic flights daily. Check EgyptAir: City 390-0999, Open 390-3441, or Helton 739-9466.

Cairo-Assisi: Tickets LE300 for Egyptians, LE991 for foreigners, both round-trip.

Cairo-Luxor: Tickets LE220 for Egyptians, LE780 for foreigners, both round-trip.

Cairo-Hurgada: LE780 for foreigners, both round-trip.

Cairo-Sharm El-Sheikh: Tickets LE246 for Egyptians, LE221 for foreigners, both round-trip.

Sunny summer deals

Hotels

Here's a look at the special rates most hotels, especially resorts, are offering to Egyptians and foreign residents.

Hurgada: Helwan Regina Hurgada. LE120 per person in a double room including breakfast, dinner, buffet and taxes. Valid until the end of the summer season.

Sharm El-Sheikh

Sharm El-Sheikh Marriott. LE240 for a single or double room including buffet breakfast, service charge and taxes.

Sharm El-Sheikh Mivnupick Hotel. LE200 for a single and LE250 for a double room in the front by the swimming pool. The hotel offers prices of LE160 for a single and LE200 for a double room in the back or sports area. Prices include buffet breakfast, service charge and taxes.

Travel agencies

Travel agencies are offering various packages both inside and outside Egypt this summer.

Flamingo Tours: A trip to Nice is LE1,850 for 8 days. Nice and London is LE3,490 for 15 days. Spain and Portugal is LE4,230 for 11 days. Athens and Rhodes is LE2,280 for 10 days. Paris and London is LE2,890 for 15 days. Rome, Florence, Venice is LE4,750 for 10 days and Singapore, Tokyo, Hong Kong, Bangkok is \$3,335 for 19 days. Prices for a special cruise around the Mediterranean in deluxe boats start from \$1,342 for 6 days.

Karnak Tours is organizing trips to Marsa Matruh for 4 days in three star hotels on a half board basis at prices starting from LE295. The company is also offering trips to Istanbul for 8 days at prices starting from LE1,450.

Festival of Alexandrias

All the Alexandrias in the world will meet in Egypt next September.

Rehab Saad looks at preparations for a festival of fun in the sun

The "Alexandrias World Festival" will bring representatives of the 35 cities in the world named Alexandria to Egypt from 18-28 September. Held under the auspices of Suzanne Mubarak and organized by the Alexandria Governorate and the Egyptian Ministry of Tourism, the festival will be a 10-day spectacle of music, dancing and colour in Egypt's Mediterranean city.

Events will include a competition for the best Alexandria song, a plastic arts

exhibition, folk dancing, yacht races, an international tourism exhibition and fashion shows.

But the climax will be a performance of the opera "Othello" which take place at Qait Bey. The closing ceremony will be staged at Al-Montazah Palace gardens.

In a meeting with the organisers of the festival, Minister of Tourism Mamdouh El-Beltagui highlighted the importance of marketing the festival worldwide.

"There should be sound marketing and promotion for this event to guarantee an influx of tourists to Alexandria at the time of the festival and afterwards," he said.

El-Beltagui suggested that international marketing firms promote tourism in the area with a package deal including air fare, opera tickets, hotel accommodations and a sightseeing programme. A working group will organise ac-

commodations, transportation, and security measures, according to the minister. "The ministry has set up a co-ordination unit to work with the Alexandria Governorate and the festival's committee," El-Beltagui said.

Alexandria Governor Ismail El-Gawhary declared that a protocol will be signed during the celebration among the mayors of the Alexandrias of the world to ensure more cooperation among them.

New excavation

THE SCA's Egyptian archaeological mission will start excavations near Menkaure's pyramid in an effort to re-discover the noblemen's cemetery originally discovered by Austrian Egyptologist Genge Reissner.

Compiled by

Nevine El-Aref

Youth hostels for all

If you haven't got a youth hostel card, you don't know what you're missing. Sherine Nasr investigates

The high cost of hotel accommodation has put travelling for enjoyment beyond the scope of many young people. But, scattered across Egypt are venues where reasonable accommodation and good meals can be found for minimal cost: the nation's youth hostels.

"There are 16 hostels throughout Egypt that welcome both Egyptians and foreigners and provide reasonable services," said Hassan Fahmy, director of the Cairo youth hostel. "The ultimate goal of these hostels is to widen young people's opportunity to tour their country. So we give priority to people coming from outside the city," he said.

For holders of the youth hostel card, a night in Alexandria or Ismailia will cost LE14, including accommodation and three daily meals. An air-conditioned room in Sharm El-Sheikh, one of Egypt's pricier destinations, is only LE10 more expensive. "The prices are within reach of almost every one. The cheapest hotels in these destinations would cost more, although hotel residents enjoy a similar standard of service," said Fahmy.

Membership of the Youth Hostel Association has other advantages. "We have one-day trips to Alexandria and Fayoum, three, four and five-day trips to St Catherine's and Sharm El-Sheikh; then there are other trips abroad, to Mediterranean and European countries, which are longer," said Fahmy. Trips to Sinai or the Red Sea area usually include a day ticket in a tourist village where participants have the opportunity to enjoy the village's facilities at special rates.

Ali Magabi, a 19-year-old student, went on a five-day trip to St Catherine, Dabab and Sharm El-Sheikh. "It was an exciting experience," he recalled. "The first night, we went up Mount Sinai and then spent the night in a chalet at the foot of the mountain. At the other sites we spent the day in tourist villages, where I went diving. The whole trip cost me LE170."

This summer, the programme includes trips to Tunisia and Germany, both lasting two weeks. The German trip costs LE3,000, the Tunisian trip is priced at

LE1,500, both including transport, accommodation and sightseeing. Such trips, said Fahmy, are open to everyone with a youth hostel card, although a good command of English or German would be an advantage for the German trip.

Those travelling in groups don't have to be part of an official tour to take full advantage of the hostels' facilities. Groups can also arrange their own tours. "A group can arrange a programme and the hostel will book the bus tickets and make the reservations," explained Fahmy. Hostel staff are also willing to suggest a programme for groups which have certain sites in mind but haven't arranged a tour.

Youth hostels today are not the spartan institutions many imagine them to be. Rules have been relaxed. "The hostel no longer closes its doors at 11pm. We can now admit people at any time provided we're given notice beforehand," said Fahmy. And, guests are now allowed to stay for longer. "A maximum of three nights used to be the rule. Now guests can stay for longer, if we have room." The mid-night lights-out and the rule that guests must be out of the dormitories by 10am, have also been relaxed.

Dormitories are being reorganised to provide more privacy. In the past the typical dormitory had 16 beds. But this is now changing in accordance with the recommendations of the International Youth Hostel Association and, when work is complete, a maximum of six people will share one dormitory. "Privacy is now recognised as a major prerequisite for guests, along with a warm welcome, safety, cleanliness and comfort," explained Fahmy.

You don't have to be young to stay in youth hostels. There is no age limit for membership, and, in an attempt to attract a different market, youth hostels in Cairo, Alexandria, Ismailia and Luxor have built family wings.

The family wing has dormitories with only two or three bedrooms, and deluxe bedrooms, said Fahmy. "Other hostels in Egypt will soon be adding family wings." Nadia Hashish spent a week with her family in Ismailia youth hostel. "We were

willing to give it a try, although we didn't really think it would work out. But it did," she said. She enjoyed the experience enough to repeat it the following year. The Ismailia hostel has a great view over Temash Lake and Nadia was happy with the standard of comfort there. "A hotel wouldn't have offered a better service," she remarked. Her family has since stayed in hostels in Port Said, Luxor and Aswan. "We had a full programme of sightseeing, organised by the hostel, using Mistr Travel buses and accompanied by a tour leader," she said. And all for half the price of what one would pay with a regular tour company. "Members of my family make sure to get a card every year to make use of the discounted prices," added Nadia.

She has also made use of her card abroad, in Germany, staying in youth hostels in Berlin and the Black Forest. For Nadia, staying in hostels is the best way to learn about different countries and adapt to different situations.

As the number of hostels increases, so do the facilities they provide. Currently under construction, the Fayoum hostel will, according to Fahmy, include a conference hall, a telecommunications office and a laundrette.

The Youth Hostel Association has also managed to negotiate discounts for card holders at many hotels, restaurants, tourist sites and transport facilities. "Card holders can get a fifty per cent discount on railways and buses. Other hotels, clubs, tourist companies and carpet and textile factories grant from 15 to 25 per cent," said Fahmy.

"A list is provided in all the hostels." As a result of all these benefits, an upsurge in membership is predicted. "Last year, we issued 25,000 cards. This year that number is expected to double," he confirmed.

The card can be issued from any youth hostel office in Egypt. Membership costs from LE2-15 according to age, and the card can be used both inside and outside Egypt.

For further information contact the main office, 1 El-Ibrahimi Street, Garden City. Tel: 356 1448

EGYPT AIR

Telephone numbers of EGYPT AIR offices in governorates:

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A single hope

The jaded Egyptian Olympic team have had more poor results, wrestler Mustafa Abdel-Hareth has gone missing from the Olympic Village, but there is still hope for the handballers. **Essam Abdel-Moneim** reports from Atlanta

After losing his first match, and failing to qualify for the second round of the wrestling competition, African and Egyptian champion wrestler Mustafa Abdel-Hareth returned to the Olympic Village, collected some of his personal belongings in a sports bag, left the village, and never came back.

According to Egyptian delegation officials, Abdel-Hareth had taken his passport to the competition weigh-in because he wanted to go out before the competition. He had not returned it to officials, claiming he was busy.

According to his coach, Abdel-Hareth had received two Egyptian visitors in the village and talked with them for a long time. The coach speculated that he was arranging his departure. Abdel-Hareth left some personal belongings behind, probably so colleagues would not realise he was missing, the coach added.

Meanwhile, the streak of bad results for the Egyptian team continues. Marksman Mohamed Khorsheid and Mustafa Ibrahim Hamdi failed to qualify for the second round of the

shoot event. Khorsheid scored 113/125 to be placed 45, while Hamdi scored 112/125 to take 49th place, out of a total of 54 competitors. Both athletes failed to fulfil their own records.

Weightlifter Tharwat El-Bendari also failed to achieve his best of 375kg, lifting only 372.5kg to take 12th place.

Only one athlete in the individual competitions has managed to distinguish himself. Rower AH Ibrahim achieved eighth place in the skiff (single oarsman) event, a better result than was expected. The Egyptian Rowing Federation had predicted that he would reach 14th place.

Egypt's sole remaining hope of a medal lies with the handballers, who have been putting on a good performance and cheering up Egyptian fans everywhere. The team won its first three matches, defeating Algeria 19-16, disposing of Brazil 30-22, and just nudging past Germany 24-22. They suffered a setback against world champions France on Monday, losing 20-25, but will still make it to the semifinals if they can beat Spain, the European runners up.



Egypt's Mahmoud Hussein trying to stop France's Frederic Volle in his team's match against Egypt where France won 25-20

Team title hopes squashed

Egypt was pushed into second place by England in the team event at the World Junior Squash Championships, reports **Eman Abdel-Moeti**

Following Ahmed Faizy's title-winning individual performance, the seating at Cairo Stadium squash courts was once again packed last Friday at the World Junior Squash Championships, this time with fans eager to see Egypt try for the team title.

The team, consisting of Ahmed Faizy, Karim El-Mistikawi and Amr Shabana, were previously undefeated in this championship, beating all rivals 3-0. With this record, they were strongly tipped to win their second world junior team title, despite having to meet a strong English side in the final.

But the English team, whose members had all been beaten by the Egyptian players in the individual event, took their revenge, beating the host team 2-1. Pakistan came third, and Switzerland took fourth place, upsetting the tough fourth-seeded Australian team in a surprise quarterfinal victory.

A sudden attack of anxiety and nerves seemed to be the cause of the Egyptian defeat. "Playing the first match, I felt under pressure to win," said a disappointed El-Mistikawi after losing to John Russell 1-3 (0-9, 9-5, 7-9, 6-9). In addition, El-Mistikawi had not exactly been on good terms with any of the judges assigned to his matches. The match with Russell was no exception, and on this occasion it did indeed seem that the Welsh judge was too strict with El-Mistikawi. But, according to technical coach Ahmed Safwat, it was mostly a case of an overdose of pressure on the young player. "It was more than he could handle," he said. "But I think the team could have done better, especially as they have more endurance than their opponents."

It had been hoped that Faizy could play the first, perhaps most nerve wracking game, win, and thus boost the moral of his teammates. But the draw did not work out like that. And, Safwat added, the large crowd was a source of anxiety, rather than support, for El-Mistikawi.

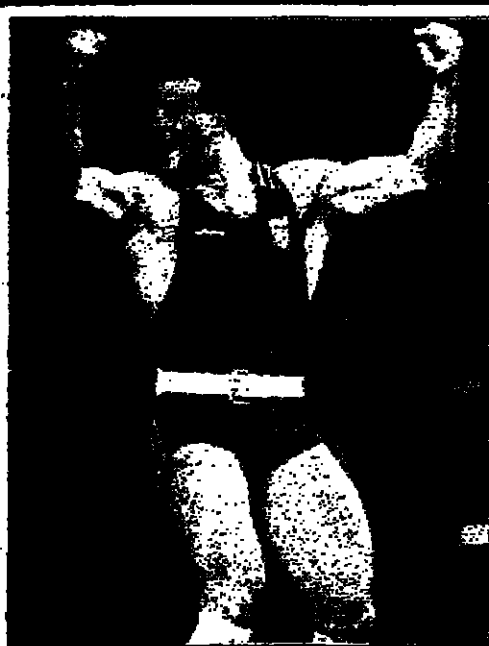
With Mistikawi's loss, Faizy was discouraged and put under yet more pressure. "It is difficult to focus on your performance when you are thinking only that you have to win," he said. "I couldn't play to my usual standard." He lost 1-3 (5-9, 4-9, 9-5, 1-9).

With hopes of victory shattered, third team member Amr Shabana was going to withdraw. But, as Safwat explained, by playing the match, Egypt would finish the tournament with a higher points score. So Shabana faced Adrian Grant on court, and, ironically, managed a sound 3-0 victory (9-5, 9-6, 9-0).



Gold for Greece

GREECE'S popular weightlifting champion, Pyros Dimes, was victorious in the 83kg category, snatching the gold easily and breaking his own world record. He lifted 180kg in the snatch, bettering his previous record of 177.5kg last year in Warsaw.



An outstanding man

Ukrainian's Timur Taimazov, broke the world record in the 108 clean and jerk by lifting 236kg breaking the old record which was 235.5kg.



Double victory

AMERICAN Gail Devers retained her 100m Olympic crown in an astonishing action replay of her 1993 World Championship victory over Merlene Ottey. Yet again the American and Jamaican were forced to wait for a photo finish, just as they had done in Stuttgart three years ago, and yet again Devers got the verdict by the narrowest of margins as both were credited with a time of 10.94 seconds.



Ethiopia's marathon win

ETHIOPIAN policewoman Fatima Roba, who has never won a major competition before, ran away from her more seasoned opponents to win a surprising victory in the Olympic women's marathon, and Africa's first gold medal in these Games.

Her time of 2 hours, 26 minutes and 5 seconds was three minutes. She finished two minutes ahead of her nearest rival, 1992 gold medalist Valentina Yegorova of Russia, who won the silver in 2:28:05.



Wang gets gold

CHINA'S super runner Wang Junxia claimed her first Olympic gold medal and announced she had blotted the man who made her famous out of her life. Wang, who won the 5000m and is seeking to add the 10,000m title to her collection, revealed she had cut all links with Ma Junren, the coach who was once a national hero in China. She underlined her debt to the controversial coach, who helped her to world records in both the 3,000m and 10,000m as well as the 1993 world title for the longer event. But after calling herself "the luckiest girl in the world" for having been trained by Ma and new coach Mao Dezheng, she distanced herself from her original mentor by saying Mao's "method is a lot more suitable to my style".

Syria's first gold

GHADA Shobaa became Syria's first ever Olympic gold medalist when she won the women's freestyle wrestling last Sunday, Syria's only other medal was won by Joseph Atiyeh in freestyle wrestling at the 1994 Los Angeles Games. Shobaa won the world championship last year in Gothenburg.



Petrov back at the top

RUSSIA'S Alexei Petrov, whose life ban for steroid use was lifted two months ago after a controversial ruling that his food had been spiked by an old girlfriend, beat his nearest rivals by a thumping 12.5kg to take the Olympic gold medal in the 91kg class. Immediately after his success, Petrov was told by the Russian Federation that he will receive a \$100,000 reward for his medal. He set a new world snatch record of 187.5kg to fulfil his promise made at the 1995 World Championships that he would rewrite the record books in Atlanta. Petrov failed a drug test for anabolic steroids after winning the World Championships in China last November. He was banned from competition for life under the International Weightlifting Federation 'get tough' policy. But the federation lifted the ban after discussing a ruling from the Russian Republic Court and hearing evidence that Petrov's girlfriend had spiked his food with six steroid pills a week before the competition.

The fastest man

DONOVAN Bailey beat the world 100m record and added the Olympic gold medal to his world title after one of the most controversial finals in the Games' history.

The Canadian ran home in 9.84 seconds, beating the previous record by one hundredth of a second, to pip pre-race favourites Frankie Fredericks of Namibia and Ato Boldon of Trinidad.

Bailey's triumph was almost blighted by 1992 champion Linford Christie, who was disqualified in sensational style after two false starts. The previous world record was held by American Leroy Burrell who ran 9.85 seconds in Lausanne in 1994.

'Simply the best'

There's nothing new about retired boxers making a comeback. But what is unusual about the decision of Chris Eubank, former WBO super-middleweight world champion and former undefeated WBC middleweight champion, is that his comeback fight is to take place in Egypt. Future fights in the Middle East are also in the pipeline.

Eubank is the only world champion to remain undefeated in 19 world title fights. During his career, he boxed 47 professional fights, sustaining only two losses and two draws before retiring. His first fight after coming out of retirement is planned for 5 October in Cairo, with an as yet unnamed top-ranked opponent.

The fight is to be sponsored by Al-Ahram Organisation. This foray into the world of big-time boxing is the latest in a series of ventures to promote sport in Egypt, following the success of the Al-

Ahram International Squash Championship and the Al-Ahram International Handball Tournament.

Eubank is in a positive frame of mind about his return to the ring. "I feel honoured and privileged to be invited here. Boxing is my area of excellence and what I do with ease," he said, before issuing the customary challenge to opponents: "Watch, read, listen and learn. Eubank is back."

Harry Hearn, Eubank's 'Middle East consultant' was not forthcoming on details of his future fights. Eubank's move to the Middle East, he said, had been undertaken to find a new challenge rather than for financial reward. "Chris has achieved everything he could achieve in Europe," he said. "He's been at the top for a long time. He had his platform and

Edited by Inas Mazhar

made his points and now he's looking for a new challenge... He's a wealthy young man but after a while he realised he was missing the platform and opportunity to entertain people. The opportunity came up in the Middle East because several governments wanted to stage Eubank's return. So this place will be rocking with people coming to see the designs of Eubank."

Chris Eubank is one of Britain's highest profile sportsmen. Nicknamed 'Simply the Best', he made his professional debut in Atlantic City against Tim Brown. His last fight was in September 1995 against Steve Collins, a bout he lost on a split decision.

His most remarkable fight was against Nigel Benn, 'the Dark Destroyer', in November 1990. Benn was paid a king's ransom to risk his WBO middleweight crown in what observers describe as the

greatest ever all-British boxing clash. The fighters were well matched, and by the ninth round the scores were even. Benn's right eye was closed and Eubank had a large cut through the bottom of his mouth, but Eubank brought the show to an end by knocking out Benn with a perfect left-hand combination.

Outside the ring, Eubank is well known for his involvement with voluntary activities. Himself a father of three, he is particularly concerned about the future of children and young people in deprived areas, and gives talks to schools and takes part in charity fund raising activities. He has also given successful lectures at the Oxford and Cambridge university unions.

Despite the violence he deals out in the ring, Eubank believes that boxing has made him a gentler, more disciplined person. "It has made me more humane," he said.



British Middleweight champion, Chris Eubank

On the sidelines

Shoes on their feet

AN OLYMPIC volunteer has made certain six runners from the Comoros Islands have shoes for the Games. Aware that the impoverished country had not supplied its runners with shoes, Dean Rojek, a sociology professor at the University of Georgia, went to a sporting goods store and bought six pairs.

"The Dream Team is being driven around in limousines, but one forgets that in the midst of this affluence, we have desperately poor countries," said Rojek. Team coach Chakira said that his runners weren't ashamed to run without shoes. "The first Olympians ran barefoot," he added.

Equestrian

THE NEW Zealand riders who won gold and silver in the Olympic Equestrian individual three-day event were determined not to break the lucky streak which began when New Zealand won the Americas' Cup yacht race in 1995. During that competition, all the crew members wore red socks. For Atlanta's three-day event, Blyth Tait and Sally Clark both wore red socks under their black riding boots for the finals.

Family reunion

GERMAN swimmers Bengt and Bjorn Zikarsky have turned the Olympics into a family reunion. The 29-year-old identical twins are competing in the Olympics at a time when their professional careers have separated them geographically. In Atlanta, the twins swam the two fastest legs of Germany's bronze medal 400 metre freestyle relay. "Sure, it's special to swim with my brother," Bengt said. "It's nice to have someone around who you really know."

Firemen share

FIREFIGHTERS are sharing a station with 19 young Hungarians in Atlanta for the Olympics. The firefighters were asked to help after the group's accommodation at an Atlanta school fell through.

The Hungarian Embassy in Washington DC contacted Olympic officials for help. The request went to the Hog Mountain firehouse in suburban Atlanta, where camp beds were set up. Local restaurants and grocery stores donated supplies for the visitors.

Making money

THE ATLANTA Olympics are on target to achieve projected profits, despite the problems of the first week, said A D Frazier, chief executive of the Atlanta Committee for the Olympic Games. He said the ticket revenue target of \$458 million has been reached. More than 8.5 million tickets out of a total of around 11.5 million available have been sold.

Gold record

KRISTINA Egerszegi of Hungary became the first swimmer in history to win five individual Olympic gold medals with her third straight victory in the 200m backstroke.

Smith in the clear

THE INTERNATIONAL Olympic Committee has silenced rumours of drug use surrounding Irish triple gold medal winner Michelle Smith. The committee said there were no positive drug tests to report.

Ukrainian wins

LILIA Podkopsyeva of the Ukraine won over an initially hostile American crowd in the 32,000 sell-out Georgia Dome when she claimed the women's individual gymnastics title.

The 17-year-old world champion outperformed Romania's Gina Gogean, Simona Amanar and Lavinia Milosovic, who took silver and two bronzes.

Drug reprieves

AUSTRALIA'S 200m sprint champion Dean Capobianco and Italian women high jumper Antonella Bevilacqua were given 11th hour reprieves by the International Amateur Athletics Federation to compete in the Atlanta Games despite positive drug tests.

Sprinter injured

WORLD record holder Butch Reynolds fell to the track with an apparent hamstring injury in the semifinals of the 400 metres, knocking him out of the Olympics. Reynolds, a challenger to Michael Johnson in the event, was just completing the first turn when he slowed to a near stop and grabbed his right hamstring. He slumped to the ground, before crawling off the track.

Closing Ceremony

ATHLETES will watch the Olympic closing ceremony from the stands of the stadium before being invited onto the field to mix and mingle as they have in every closing ceremony. The athletes will be seated at the uncovered north end of the stadium.

A single flag-bearer from each nation will march around the track. Then, after the closing show, featuring singer Gloria Estefan and other entertainers, the athletes will make their way to the stadium floor.

Volunteers quit

MORE than 300 law officers have quit their posts as volunteer Olympic security guards. The volunteers complained of filthy toilets, poor food and cockroaches at Morehouse College, where they are staying in dormitories, and bad organisation at the Olympic venues.

Fans have upper hand

THREE dozen extra policemen were called in to control a crowd of fans protesting a scheduling change which would have prevented them seeing tennis star Andre Agassi.

When spectators were told that Agassi would not be playing in the Olympic Stadium as scheduled, fans delayed a women's match with persistent booing and chanting, and when 200 to 300 angry fans gathered outside an adjacent court where the revised schedule called for Agassi to play, officials feared they would storm the gates.

More than 20 police cars arrived, but the situation remained tense until an official announced that the schedule change had been revised, and Agassi would play at the stadium as originally planned.

Vsevoled Demidov: Master of the mystery

In the land where the lights never go out, some go mad or kill themselves; others take up landscaping. There is the piano, and its soul — and then, there is the thing

Vsevoled Demidov has left Cairo for home and Moscow. The great pedagogue of the piano. There was laughing and weeping to say good-bye after the concert of his latest pupil. He comes from Russia with love. He looks like almost any Russian, lime-coloured. He talks and laughs but he's quiet. He's expansive but retiring. He talks almost with sibylline ambiguity about music, avoids head-on discussions because he seldom contradicts. But when he begins quietly to make a musical point, the steady thing inside the velvet glove is immediately felt. He's almost horrendously learned about the piano, its players, their methods and the piano scene. His memory seems total and covers history, present

Mahler said it was the thing behind the notes, Goethe the invisible elevator. Bee-thoven said the notes were where you began and Demidov, the last person to be associated with such grand names, used to say "Well (with characteristic Russian smile, eyes rolling heavenwards, the heart). Without this thing, the most perfect piano technique never coaxes the instrument away from being a machine made of steel, iron, ivory and wood."



The key, the thing, is mythical like Ariadne's thread through the Minotaur's labyrinth. It's not there and not seen, but without it you cannot get out to freedom of expression. Everyone searches for the key to the thing. It has been clear to piano addicts here in Cairo for years that professor Demidov has this key. The thing is the mystery. It supports music in New Guinea or at Carnegie Hall. It has no name, merely ill-appropriate word combinations offering approximate meanings.

With the thing, the piano melts to submission and from angelic whisperings it can command a majestic force to quell the Berlin Philharmonic Orchestra. It is therefore no instrument for infant prodigy show-offs, though a few (Liszt) did tame it at a tender age. The piano is for the long-distance creative artist. It is possible for such people to abandon it for a decade — then back again to it with a revelation of new ideas and totally new spins on the well-trodden classical treadmill. Once understood, it is a friend for life.

Pianos seem to have souls. They dance and they flow through a concert hall as water. Nothing is beyond the piano. Its very force, its gentle delicacy, these absolutes strike all. Pianists ebb and flow during lifetimes at the extent of its width of

power. And to Demidov. Today, the tag end of the tumultuous twentieth century, all the arts are in the same exciting mix-up. What goes into the mess comes out — but shaken to its foundations, or into something quite new. The piano, having the largest repertoire and extent of sound and visualisation, has survived all this chaos almost unscathed. We have Ligeti and triple vision composers who fill the instrument full of hand towels to create new sound effects, play the strings and not the keys. It has also entered the harpist's heaven and the wooden forearmed metal-manacled mad macho groups who pound the instrument to pulp. It's the macho monsters who end up with bleeding fingers.

Music and the piano survive. Today, if young and beginning a career, whether to sing or play an instrument, you must find a teacher who knows scene and instrument with depth and imagination and — the key — the thing. If not, you may as well take up landscaping. Such is the competition in the musical uplands.

The key is the thing. A being whose mental equipment is to impart knowledge is not enough. Many wish to impart. There must be the feel of the inner mystery of music itself, how to impart this feeling, and the very practical knowledge of how to deliver this to the mob who sit below and listen, most ears waiting for defects or a loss of sheer force. It's the key which makes the pupil into a finished artist of power and heart, not noise or clutter.

Anything you can do on the piano someone else can do better; not by the Demidov standards. Some players keep going on to plaudits and hype who can really do nothing. They are the tag-along players audiences have to put up with, others keep on, some kill themselves, some go mad. Meanwhile, the classical repertoire has gone off the disc with overexposure to the decadence of the style itself.

But he has something of the professional magician about him. This master projector and protector, a father, a ruler in a tightly-knit family unit. There are those within and those without. He will under no pressure talk about himself. "Ask my pupils, write of the pupils, take their photographs."

Yet no easy modesty seems to be his pattern; it is natural for him not to talk shop to outsiders. They are for admiring, criticising and going their way. But the piano, like the voice, is of the land where the lights never go out. What they know no one else knows. And the curtains draw together tightly, extinguishing him from the outside world. All communication rests with the piano and those who learn to love and respect it.

Demidov was in Cairo in the '60s — the crazy rough-water '60s. The Russians were here. In those days he seemed apart yet belonged. Anyway he stayed, returning to Russia at times, the era past with Demidov, the aloof Russian, the ever-sympathetic still in Cairo, too bland to be true. Yet true he was; his very exalted level of influence saved him from the storms. In fact, his ability to stand rock-firm helped the assistant to assist. How did he teach? He did not. He says he helped — assisted. Such was his power, pupils were never afraid — awed but never put down. He could be devastating very nicely. Scatter-brains were out, yet things were lively, spunky and, when need be, the pupils were egged on to be frisky. During a lesson a girl would say to him: "Mr Demidov, it isn't right". He would answer: "Yes, it never will be, you can't do it. But try hard and you will know how it should be done." And later, it was done.

He was equally good with boys or girls; a little less lenient with the boys; the girls were given a special dimension of their own. His attitude was completely asexual. Girls were never turned into men, the better to compete. They should have their own field of expression, left alone to develop and

work out problems without his shadow falling across them. Yet he made sure his shadow was there and if the youth of the player exceeded what he thought was the correct force, she would be asked: did she not think a more reserved interpretation would be better?

He tolerated no tricks for immediate applause approval. Never once has Demidov turned out a flashy or superficial musician. When all the darkness job is done it's what comes on in the light of the concert appearance that matters. There is the performing emanation, the sense of occasion, and the manner in which the instrument is to be treated. Tricks and circus ventures out. All theatre effects were to be thrown to the trash cans; his players have a grand style. They don't throw themselves around, yet they have courage to attempt grand undertakings even if the ventures never lead them into the late 20th century repertoire. Demidov wanted no CV, no photos, no words. What he wanted were master pupils. Life was there, outside, and it would be their business to cope with it, armed with his wisdom. Some will, some won't and some will fall by the wayside.

His pupils went the other day to the airport to see him off to Moscow. There was weeping as well as laughing. One girl beginning to be known in the piano world said: "I don't know what I can do. You see, I always played for him." She cried very quietly. Obviously nothing would help her with this moment of loss. But hers was the same loss the others felt and later Cairo will feel. Be worthy of him wherever you play, be worthy. The line of very beautiful pupils was standing or waving or weeping — and he was gone. Not a bad way for a father to be remembered in 1996.

Profile by David Blake

Pack of Cards

by Madame Sosostri

President Mubarak awards Sheikh Ahmed Mussallam (right) and Ann-Marie Schmiel (far right)



A few hours before travelling to the USA, and just before he delivered a speech at the Ministry of Al-Awqaf (Religious Endowments) in celebration of the Prophet Muhammad's birthday, last Sunday President Hosni Mubarak conferred decorations on twelve scholars in recognition of their services to Islam. These included two German scholars — Orientalist and former professor at Harvard University Ann-Marie Schmiel, and former German ambassador to

Morocco, Murad Hofmann. Amongst those also recognised were the late renowned *hadith* scholar Ahmed Shakir, the late Grand Sheikh of Al-Azhar Gad El-Haq Ali Gad El-Haq, and head of the Jerusalem Jihad and Muslim Minorities Committee of the Islamic Research Academy and deputy head of the Farwa Committee, Sheikh Ahmad Mussallam.

Held at the Cairo International Conference Centre in Nasr City, the award-giving ceremony was attended by

Prime Minister Kamal El-Ganzouri, Head of the Shura Council, Mustafa Kamal Helwi, Grand Sheikh of Al-Azhar Mohamed Sayed Tantawi, Al-Awqaf Minister Hamdi Zaqzuq and Cairo Governor Omar Abdel-Akher, as well as ministers, ambassadors, eminent Egyptian and Arab statesmen, and representatives of the delegations of 71 Muslim countries attending the 8th Higher Council of Islamic Affairs Conference which concluded that same day.

Not quite killing us softly with their song — at least not all of them — singers from 21 countries are currently in Cairo to take part in the second annual Cairo International Song Festival, held under the auspices of Minister of Tourism Mamdouh El-Beltagi. I myself have struggled with the decision of whether I should enter or not, and was only finally convinced not to when I saw that the super-talented Lutfi Bushnaq, Kazem Saher, Mohamed Mounir, Hani Shaker, Ihab Tawfiq and the Jordanian singer Osama Jabbar were just a few of those performing during the event. The festival's opening ceremony last night at the Cairo International Conference Centre in Nasr City brought together ministers, ambassadors, businessmen, artists and the participants themselves who were welcomed by festival president Fawzi Abdel-Maksoud and El-Beltagi himself, who paid tribute to the Egyptian singers, composers and songwriters Abdel-Halim Hafiz, Farid El-Atrash and Ahmed Rami. Much to my delight, there was a poetry recital by renowned lyricist Abdel-Rahman El-Abaoudi. Only Mahmoud Reda, Egypt's most famous choreographer could arrange a song and dance performance by singer/actor Samir Sabri and his troupe. So he did, and the result was simply spectacular. Over the next few days, the walls of the Conference Centre's hall will ring with the sound of 47 songs sung by foreign singers as part of the foreign competition, and many more will be heard from those taking part in the Arab and Professional Singers' competitions. If you happen to be driving by at any time, I advise you to keep your car windows rolled up and your seat belts securely fastened — this is one event that is definitely guaranteed to have a resounding effect.

But what's all this talk about song festivals and foreign and Arab competitions? What I want is some real noise — a concert to beat all concerts. And few are the times when I don't get what I want. Some women my age go walking to stay fit, others do gentle exercises. I find that pushing my way through thousands of screaming teenagers does the trick quite nicely, and so tomorrow and the

day after I will be doing just that at a pop music concert in the Chinese Gardens of the Conference Centre given by Whigfield, Lee John, Imagination, Snap and MN8.

Mohamed Taymour is one of the few people, myself included, who have witnessed the Al-Ahram Organisation blossom and bloom over the years. When Taymour joined Al-Ahram as an engineer twenty-eight years ago, the print shop was using the only method available for printing at the time — putting lead letters and characters together to form words, sentences and eventually whole pages. When photo-composing — printing onto sticky bromide paper — came along years later, it was almost like a dream come true: not only did it save time, but energy too. And then computers came onto the scene. It's been a few years, in fact, since Al-Ahram started using computers to create negatives and films, and when it did, it didn't take Taymour long to master the highest form of technology of them all, and he went on to play the leading role in ensuring that the whole organisation was computerised from A to Z. And now, I am thrilled to hear that my life-long friend has been appointed general manager of Al-Ahram's printing press. Not only of the two sites that currently exist, on Galaa St and the corniche, but he will also be managing Al-Ahram's latest and largest site, to be opened soon in 6 October City. A new printing press, a new general manager — and how fitting it is, also, that Taymour is the first engineer in Al-Ahram history to hold this post: when times change, dears, so must we with them.

Poor Mohamed Shebl. He barely has time to come into the office or see his friends any more. Life can be so difficult when you're a film director in demand, and that is exactly what he is these days. Mohamed is currently in Switzerland to take part in this year's Locarno Film Festival,

which begins today and will go on for the next eleven days. Having made a documentary about Egypt's most controversial film director, Youssef Chahine, and his film *Al-Muhajer*, it is not surprising that Mohamed should be invited to take part in the festival, which will be paying tribute to Chahine and his works, from his first film *Baba Amin*, to his most recent one, *Al-Muhajer*. In cooperation with the Egyptian National Film Institute, and French and Polish film companies, Chahine's films will be dubbed in French for the festival and shown to all those taking part. And once they've seen the films they can then see the actors in the flesh because attending the conference will be Omar Sherif, Hani Roustom, Tahia Carloa, Youssra and Mahmoud Hemeda. Film critics Rafik El-Sabbah, Samir Farid, Youssef Sherif Ritzgallah and Mohamed Shebl will be participating in a seminar about the director, his work and its place in cinema history. All very interesting stuff, but what caught my eye, and is making me seriously consider hopping on the next plane out to be a part of it all is the fact that one of my favourite Chahine films, *Bob El-Hadid* will be shown in the open air to over 10,000 viewers in the city's biggest square.

When Secretary-General of the Arab League Esmat Abdel-Meguid decided to take in a little art in Paris a few days ago, it was obvious that there was only one place where he could really find it. Now most of you may think of going to the Louvre, but both he and I know that if we want art that brings us closer to home, drawn by some of Egypt's most renowned artists who had lived in France and had been influenced by the country's art style, then Al-Ahram's Paris bureau was the place to go. Accompanied by bureau manager Sherif El-Shoubashi, Abdel-Meguid visited the lobby which displays a permanent collection of works by artists such as Farouk Hosni, George Sabbagh and Youssef Francis.

Question: what do you get if you cross a tall, dark and handsome Al-Ahram employee with a stunningly beautiful Al-Ahram employee? Answer: a wonderfully romantic wedding and — I hope — a long and happy marriage. Colleagues Sahar Ismail and Adel El-Mahdi's recent wedding party at the El-Saba Hotel by the Pyramids saw the mass migration of members of the whole Al-Ahram Organisation as friends and colleagues showed up in droves to congratulate the happy couple and wish them all the best.



(l-r) Chahine, Taymour and the happy couple Sahar and Adel

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